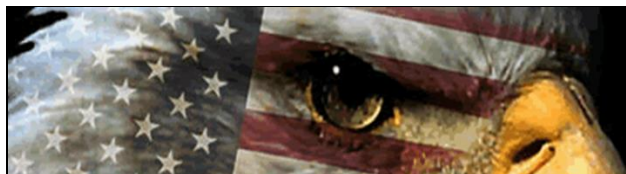



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/11 Museums still hold Native remains
SOURCE	https://www.propublica.org/article/repatriation-nagpra-museums-human-remains?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations&utm_content=feature
GIST	As the United States pushed Native Americans from their lands to make way for westward expansion throughout the 1800s, museums and the federal government encouraged the looting of Indigenous remains, funerary objects and cultural items. Many of the institutions continue to hold these today — and in some cases resist their return despite the 1990 passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

“We never ceded or relinquished our dead. They were stolen,” James Riding In, then an Arizona State University professor who is Pawnee, said of the unreturned remains.

ProPublica this year is investigating the failure of NAGPRA to bring about the expeditious return of human remains by federally funded universities and museums. Our reporting, in partnership with NBC News, has found that a small group of institutions and government bodies has played an outsized role in the law’s failure.

Ten institutions hold about half of the Native American remains that have not been returned to tribes. These include old and prestigious museums with collections taken from ancestral lands not long after the U.S. government forcibly removed Native Americans from them, as well as state-run institutions that amassed their collections from earthen burial mounds that had protected the dead for hundreds of years. Two are arms of the U.S. government: the [Interior Department](#), which administers the law, and the [Tennessee Valley Authority](#), the nation’s largest federally owned utility.

An Interior Department spokesperson said it complies with its legal obligations and that its bureaus (such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Land Management) are not required to begin the repatriation of “culturally unidentifiable human remains” unless a tribe or Native Hawaiian organization makes a formal request.

Tennessee Valley Authority Archaeologist and Tribal Liaison Marianne Shuler said the agency is committed to “partnering with federally recognized tribes as we work through the NAGPRA process.”

The law required institutions to publicly report their holdings and to consult with federally recognized tribes to determine which tribes human remains and objects should be repatriated to. Institutions were meant to consider cultural connections, including oral traditions as well as geographical, biological and archaeological links.

Yet many institutions have interpreted the definition of “cultural affiliation” so narrowly that they’ve been able to dismiss tribes’ connections to ancestors and keep remains and funerary objects. Throughout the 1990s, institutions including the [Ohio History Connection](#) and the [University of Tennessee, Knoxville](#) thwarted the repatriation process by categorizing everything in their collections that might be subject to the law as “culturally unidentifiable.”

Ohio History Connection’s director of American Indian relations, Alex Wesaw, who is also a citizen of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, said that the institution’s original designation of so many collections as culturally unidentifiable may have “been used as a means to keep people on shelves for research and for other things that our institution just doesn’t allow anymore.”

In a statement provided to ProPublica, a University of Tennessee, Knoxville spokesperson said that the university is “actively building relationships with and consulting with Tribal communities.”

ProPublica found that the [American Museum of Natural History](#) has not returned some human remains taken from the Southwest, arguing that they are too old to determine which tribes — among dozens in the region — would be the correct ones to repatriate to. In the Midwest, the [Illinois State Museum](#) for decades refused to establish a cultural affiliation for Native American human remains that predated the arrival of Europeans in the region in 1673, citing no reliable written records during what archaeologists called the “pre-contact” or “prehistoric” period.

The American Museum of Natural History declined to comment for this story.

In a statement, Illinois State Museum Curator of Anthropology Brooke Morgan said that “archaeological and historical lines of evidence were privileged in determining cultural affiliation” in the mid-1990s, and that “a theoretical line was drawn in 1673.” Morgan attributed the museum’s past approach to a weakness of the law that she said did not encourage multiple tribes to collectively claim cultural affiliation, a practice she said is common today.

As of last month, about 200 institutions — including the [University of Kentucky's William S. Webb Museum of Anthropology](#) and the nonprofit [Center for American Archeology](#) in Kampsville, Illinois — had repatriated none of the remains of more than 14,000 Native Americans in their collections. Some institutions with no recorded repatriations possess the remains of a single individual; others have as many as a couple thousand.

A University of Kentucky spokesperson told ProPublica the William S. Webb Museum “is committed to repatriating all Native American ancestral remains and funerary belongings, sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony to Native nations” and that the institution has recently committed \$800,000 toward future efforts.

Jason L. King, the executive director of the Center for American Archeology, said that the institution has complied with the law: “To date, no tribes have requested repatriation of remains or objects from the CAA.”

When the federal repatriation law passed in 1990, the Congressional Budget Office estimated it would take 10 years to repatriate all covered objects and remains to Native American tribes. Today, many tribal historic preservation officers and NAGPRA professionals characterize that estimate as laughable, given that Congress has never fully funded the federal office tasked with overseeing the law and administering consultation and repatriation grants. Author Chip Colwell, a former curator at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, estimates repatriation will take at least another 70 years to complete. But the Interior Department, now led by the first Native American to serve in a cabinet position, is seeking changes to regulations that would push institutions to complete repatriation within three years. Some who work on repatriation for institutions and tribes have raised concerns about the feasibility of this timeline.

Our investigation included an analysis of records from more than 600 institutions; interviews with more than 100 tribal leaders, museum professionals and others; and the review of nearly 30 years of transcripts from the federal committee that hears disputes related to the law.

D. Rae Gould, executive director of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Initiative at Brown University and a member of the Hassanamisco Band of Nipmucs of Massachusetts, said institutions that don't want to repatriate often claim there's inadequate evidence to link ancestral human remains to any living people.

Gould said “one of the faults with the law” is that institutions, and not tribes, have the final say on whether their collections are considered culturally related to the tribes seeking repatriation. “Institutions take advantage of it,” she said.

Some of the nation's most prestigious museums continue to hold vast collections of remains and funerary objects that could be returned under NAGPRA.

[Harvard University's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology](#) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, [University of California, Berkeley](#) and the [Field Museum](#) in Chicago each hold the remains of more than 1,000 Native Americans. Their earliest collections date back to the 19th and early 20th centuries, when their curators sought to amass encyclopedic collections of human remains.

Many anthropologists from that time justified large-scale collecting as a way to preserve evidence of what they wrongly believed was an extinct race of “Moundbuilders” — one that predated and was unrelated to Native Americans. Later, after that theory proved to be false, archaeologists still excavated gravesites under a different racist justification: Many scientists who embraced the U.S. eugenics movement used plundered craniums for studies that argued Native Americans were inferior to white people based on their skull sizes.

These colonialist myths were also used to justify the U.S. government's brutality toward Native Americans and fuel much of the racism that they continue to face today.

“Native Americans have always been the object of study instead of real people,” said Shannon O’Loughlin, chief executive of the Association on American Indian Affairs and a citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

As the new field of archaeology gained momentum in the 1870s, the Smithsonian Institution struck a deal with U.S. Army Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman to pay each of his soldiers up to \$500 — or roughly \$14,000 in 2022 dollars — for items such as clothing, weapons and everyday tools sent back to Washington.

“We are desirous of procuring large numbers of complete equipments in the way of dress, ornament, weapons of war” and “in fact everything bearing upon the life and character of the Indians,” Joseph Henry, the first secretary of the Smithsonian, wrote to Sherman on May 22, 1873.

The Smithsonian Institution today holds in storage the remains of roughly 10,000 people, more than any other U.S. museum. However, it reports its repatriation progress under a different law, the National Museum of the American Indian Act. And it does not publicly share information about what it has yet to repatriate with the same detail that NAGPRA requires of institutions it covers. Instead, the Smithsonian shares its inventory lists with tribes, two spokespeople told ProPublica.

Frederic Ward Putnam, who was appointed curator of Harvard University’s Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology in 1875, commissioned and funded excavations that would become some of the earliest collections at Harvard, the American Museum of Natural History and the Field Museum. He also helped establish the anthropology department and museum at UC Berkeley — which holds more human remains taken from Native American gravesites than any other U.S. institution that must comply with NAGPRA.

For the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Putnam commissioned the self-taught archaeologist Warren K. Moorehead to lead excavations in southern Ohio to take human remains and “relics” for display. Much of what Moorehead unearthed from Ohio’s Ross and Warren counties became founding collections of the Field Museum.

A few years after Moorehead’s excavations, the American Museum of Natural History co-sponsored rival expeditions to the Southwest; items were looted from New Mexico’s Chaco Canyon and shipped by train to New York. They remain premiere collections of the institution.

As of last month the Field Museum has returned to tribes legal control of 28% of the remains of 1,830 Native Americans it has reported to the National Park Service, which administers the law and keeps inventory data. It still holds at least 1,300 Native American remains.

28%

Percentage of the remains of the more than 1,800 Native Americans that the Field Museum has made available for return to tribes. **The institution still holds at least 1,300 remains.**

In a statement, the Field Museum said that data from the park service is out of date. (The museum publishes separate data on its [repatriation website](#) that it says is frequently updated and more accurate.) A spokesperson told ProPublica that “all Native American human remains under NAGPRA are available for return.”

The museum has acknowledged that Moorehead’s excavations would not meet today’s standards. But the museum continues to benefit from those collections. Between 2003 and 2005, it accepted \$400,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities to preserve its North American Ethnographic and Archaeological collection — including the material excavated by Moorehead — for future use by anthropologists and other researchers. That’s nearly four times more than it received in grants from the National Park Service during the same period to support its repatriation efforts under NAGPRA.

In a statement, the museum said it has the responsibility to care for its collections and that the \$400,000 grant was “used for improved stewardship of objects in our care as well as organizing information to better understand provenance and to make records more publicly accessible.”

Records show the Field Museum has categorized all of its collections excavated by Moorehead as culturally unidentifiable. The museum said that in 1995, it notified tribes with historical ties to southern Ohio about those collections but did not receive any requests for repatriation or disposition. Helen Robbins, the museum’s director of repatriation, said that formally linking specific tribes with those sites is challenging, but that it may be possible after consultations with tribes.

The museum’s president and CEO, Julian Siggers, has criticized proposals intended to speed up repatriation. In March 2022, Siggers wrote to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland that if new regulations empowered tribes to request repatriations on the basis of geographical ties to collections rather than cultural ties, museums such as the Field would need more time and money to comply. ProPublica found that the Field Museum has received more federal money to comply with NAGPRA than any other institution in the country.

Robbins said that among the institution’s challenges to repatriation is a lack of funding and staff. “That being said,” added Robbins, “we recognize that much of this work has taken too long.”

From the 1890s through the 1930s, archaeologists carried out large-scale excavations of burial mounds throughout the Midwest and Southeast, regions where federal policy had forcibly pushed tribes from their land. Of the 10 institutions that hold the most human remains in the country, seven are in regions that were inhabited by Indigenous people with mound building cultures, ProPublica found.

Among them are the [Ohio History Connection](#), the [University of Kentucky’s William S. Webb Museum of Anthropology](#), the [University of Tennessee, Knoxville](#) and the [Illinois State Museum](#).

Archaeological research suggests that the oldest burial mounds were built roughly [11,000 years ago](#) and that the practice lasted through the 1400s. The oral histories of many present-day tribes link their ancestors to earthen mounds. Their structures and purposes vary, but many include spaces for communal gatherings and platforms for homes and for burying the dead. But some institutions have argued these histories aren’t adequate proof that today’s tribes are the rightful stewards of the human remains and funerary objects removed from the mounds, which therefore should stay in museums.

The remains of at least

7,100

people were categorized by the Ohio History Connection as “culturally unidentifiable.” The institution made the remains of **17 Native Americans** available for return, or 0.2%.

Like national institutions, local museums likewise make liberal use of the “culturally unidentifiable” designation to resist returning remains. For example, in 1998 the Ohio Historical Society (now [Ohio History Connection](#)) categorized its entire collection, which today includes more than 7,100 human remains, as “culturally unidentifiable.” It has made available for return the remains of 17 Native Americans, representing 0.2% of the human remains in its collections.

“It’s tough for folks who worked in the field their entire career and who are coming at it more from a colonial perspective — that what you would find in the ground is yours,” said Wesaw of previous generations’ practices. “That’s not the case anymore. That’s not how we operate.”

For decades, Indigenous people in Ohio have protested the museum’s decisions, claiming in public meetings of the federal committee that oversees how the law is implemented that their oral histories trace back to mound-building cultures. As one commenter, Jean McCoard of the Native American Alliance of Ohio, pointed out in 1997, there are no federally recognized tribes in Ohio because they were forcibly removed. As a result, McCoard argued, archaeologists in the state have been allowed to disassociate ancestral human remains from living people without much opposition. Since the early 1990s, the Native

American Alliance of Ohio has advocated for the reburial of all human remains held by Ohio History Connection. It has yet to happen.

Wesaw said that the museum is starting to engage more with tribes to return their ancestors and belongings. Every other month, the museum's NAGPRA specialist— a newly created position that is fully dedicated to its repatriation work — convenes virtual meetings with leaders from many of the roughly 45 tribes with ancestral ties to Ohio.

But, Wesaw said, the challenges run deep.

“It’s an old museum,” said Wesaw. “Since 1885, there have been a number of archaeologists that have made their careers on the backs of our ancestors pulled out of the ground or mounds. It’s really, truly heartbreaking when you think about that.”

Moreover, ProPublica’s investigation found that some collections were amassed with the help of federal funding. The vast majority of NAGPRA collections held by the [University of Kentucky’s William S. Webb Museum of Anthropology](#) are from excavations funded by the federal government under the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration from the late 1930s into the 1940s. Kentucky’s rural and impoverished counties held burial mounds, and Washington funded excavations of 48 sites in at least 12 counties to create jobs for the unemployed.

More than 80% of the Webb Museum’s holdings that are subject to return under federal law originated from WPA excavations. The museum, which in 1996 designated every one of its collections as “culturally unidentifiable,” has yet to repatriate any of the roughly 4,500 human remains it has reported to the federal government. However, the museum has recently hired its first NAGPRA coordinator and renewed consultations with tribal nations after decades of avoiding repatriation. A spokesperson told ProPublica that one ongoing repatriation project at the museum will lead to the return of about 15% of the human remains in its collections.

In a statement, a museum spokesperson said that “we recognize the pain caused by past practices” and that the institution plans to commit more resources toward repatriation.

The University of Kentucky recently told ProPublica that it plans to spend more than \$800,000 between 2023 and 2025 on repatriation, including the hiring of three more museum staff positions.

In 2010, the Interior Department implemented [a new rule](#) that provided a way for institutions to return remains and items without establishing a cultural affiliation between present-day tribes and their ancestors. But, ProPublica found, some institutions have resisted doing so.

Experts say a lack of funding from Congress to the National NAGPRA Program has hampered enforcement of the law. The National Park Service was only recently able to fund one full-time staff position dedicated to investigating claims that institutions are not complying with the law; allegations can range from withholding information from tribes about collections, to not responding to consultation requests, to refusing to repatriate. Previously, the program relied on a part-time investigator.

Moreover, institutions that have violated the law have faced only minuscule fines, and some are not fined at all even after the Interior Department has found wrongdoing. Since 1990, the Interior Department has collected only \$59,111.34 from 20 institutions for which it had substantiated allegations. That leaves tribal nations to shoulder the financial and emotional burden of the repatriation work.

20

Institutions the Interior Department has fined for failing to comply with NAGPRA since 1990, for a total of \$59,111.34.

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, a tribe in California, pressured UC Berkeley for years to repatriate more than a thousand ancestral remains, according to the tribe’s attorney. It finally happened in

2018 following a decade-long campaign that involved costly legal wrangling and travel back and forth to Berkeley by the tribes' leaders.

"To me, there's no money, there's no dollar amount, on the work to be done. But the fact is, not every tribe has the same infrastructure and funding that others have," said Nakia Zavalla, the cultural director for the tribe. "I really feel for those tribes that don't have the funding, and they're relying just on federal funds."

A UC Berkeley spokesperson declined to comment on its interactions with the Santa Ynez Chumash, saying the school wants to prioritize communication with the tribe.

The [University of Alabama Museums](#) is among the institutions that have forced tribes into lengthy disputes over repatriation.

In June 2021, seven tribal nations indigenous to what is now the southeastern United States collectively asked the university to return the remains of nearly 6,000 of their ancestors. Their ancestors had been among more than 10,000 whose remains were unearthed by anthropologists and archaeologists between the 1930s and the 1980s from the second-largest mound site in the country. The site, colonially known as Moundville, was an important cultural and trade hub for Muskogean-speaking people between about 1050 and 1650.

An aerial photograph shows the Moundville site circa the 1930s Credit:Alabama Department of Archives and History

Tribes had tried for more than a decade to repatriate Moundville ancestors, but the university had claimed they were all "culturally unidentifiable." Emails between university and tribal leaders in 2018 show that when the university finally agreed to begin repatriation, it insisted that before it could return the human remains it needed to re-inventory its entire Moundville collection — a process it said would take five years. The "re-inventory" would entail photographing and CT scanning human remains to collect data for future studies, which the tribes opposed.

In October 2021, leaders from the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Chickasaw Nation, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, and Seminole Tribe of Florida brought the issue to the federal NAGPRA Review Committee, which can recommend a finding of cultural affiliation that is not legally binding. (Disputes over these findings are relatively rare.) The tribal leaders submitted a [117-page document detailing how Muskogean-speaking tribes are related](#) and how their shared history can be traced back to the Moundville area long before the arrival of Europeans.

"Our elders tell us that the Muskogean-speaking tribes are related to each other. We have a shared history of colonization and a shared history of rebuilding from it," Ian Thompson, a tribal historic preservation officer with the Choctaw Nation, [told the NAGPRA review committee](#) in 2021.

The tribes eventually forced the [largest repatriation in NAGPRA's history](#). Last year, the university agreed to return the remains of 10,245 ancestors.

The University of Alabama did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

The University of Alabama Museums still holds the remains of more than **2,900** Native Americans.

Many tribal and museum leaders say they are optimistic that a new generation of archaeologists, as well as museum and institutional leaders, want to better comply with the law.

At the [University of Oklahoma](#), for instance, new archaeology department hires were shocked to learn about their predecessors' failures. [Marc Levine](#), associate curator of archaeology at the university's Sam Noble Museum, said that when he arrived in 2013, there was more than enough evidence to begin repatriation, but his predecessors hadn't prioritized the work. Through collaboration with tribal nations,

	<p>Levine has compiled evidence that would allow thousands of human remains to be repatriated — and NAGPRA work isn't technically part of his job description. The university has no full-time NAGPRA coordinator. Still, Levine estimates that at the current pace, repatriating the university's holdings could take another decade.</p> <p>Prominent institutions such as Harvard have issued public apologies in recent years for past collection practices, even as criticism continues over their failure to complete the work of repatriation. (Harvard did not respond to multiple requests for comment).</p> <p>Other institutions under fire, such as UC Berkeley, have publicly pledged to prioritize repatriation. And the Society for American Archaeology, a professional organization that argued in a 1986 policy statement that "all human remains should receive appropriate scientific study," now recommends archaeologists obtain consent from descendant communities before conducting studies.</p> <p>In October, the Biden administration proposed regulations that would eliminate "culturally unidentifiable" as a designation for human remains, among other changes. Perhaps most significantly, the regulations would direct institutions to defer to tribal nations' knowledge of their customs, traditions and histories when making repatriation decisions.</p> <p>But for people who have been doing the work since its passage, NAGPRA was never complicated.</p> <p>"You either want to do the right thing or you don't," said Brown University's Gould.</p> <p>She added: "It's an issue of dignity at this point."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Putin deploys 'Sledgehammer' in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/nuke-vladimir-putin-ukraine/2023/01/10/id/1103869/
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin has deployed the world's largest nuke-capable mortar weapon to the battlefield, the British publication Mirror reported Tuesday.</p> <p>Nicknamed "the Sledgehammer," the 2S4 Tulip is capable of firing nuclear munitions, likely considered "micro-nukes," that can destroy an area the size of a football stadium.</p> <p>"This is a huge weapon, devastating when using conventional weapons and capable of smashing a large area," an unnamed security source told the Mirror. "But they will also be a very large target for Ukraine's drone and artillery teams, who are hunting down Russia's offensive equipment daily."</p> <p>And "the 2S5 is capable of targeting something from beyond its line of sight with bombs that would be very difficult, if at all, to deflect or intercept."</p> <p>On the same day of reports indicating Putin is deploying nuclear-capable weapons to the battlefield, other outlets report U.S. officials as saying Russia has lost three-quarters of its conventional firepower, otherwise suggesting Putin is becoming more desperate.</p> <p>And as professor John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago puts it, Putin views NATO's expansion toward Russia's borders, as well as losing the war in Ukraine, as an "existential threat."</p> <p>"I don't see the Americans quitting," the professor added, speaking in regard to U.S. support for Ukraine. "I don't think the Ukrainians have the agency by themselves to stop this [war]. And for that reason, I find it hard to see how this [war] comes to an end anytime soon."</p> <p>In terms of a peace agreement, Mearsheimer wagers the only way one could be reached is if Ukraine refuses to join NATO.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Ukraine: Soledar battles Russia attack
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-donetsk-9cc363adc31419311cadb3c5ed8e0601?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_05
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The fate of a devastated salt-mining town in eastern Ukraine hung in the balance Wednesday as Ukraine said its forces were holding out against a furious Russian onslaught in what has become one of the fiercest and most costly battles in the almost 11-month war.</p> <p>Though unlikely to provide a turning point in the war, Soledar's fall to Russian forces after months of Ukrainian defense would be a prize for the Kremlin, which has been starved of good news from the battlefield amid Ukraine's counteroffensive in recent months. It would also offer Russian troops a strategic springboard for their efforts to encircle the nearby city of Bakhmut.</p> <p>The spokesman for Ukraine's Eastern Group of Forces, Serhiy Cherevaty, said Wednesday that Russian claims it had conquered Soledar were "untrue," Ukrainian news outlet Suspilne reported.</p> <p>Cherevaty offered no further details, saying only that Ukraine's General Staff would provide more information later.</p> <p>The General Staff in its Wednesday morning update only listed Soledar among cities and towns that continue to be shelled by Russian forces.</p> <p>Late Tuesday, Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of the Wagner Group — a Russian private military contractor — claimed in audio reports posted on his Russian social media platform that his forces had seized control of Soledar, though he also said that battles were continuing in a "cauldron" in the city's center.</p> <p>The Associated Press was unable to verify that claim.</p> <p>Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday that Russian forces had "positive dynamics in advancing" in Soledar, but he stopped short of declaring its capture when asked about the claims that it has come under Russian control.</p> <p>"Let's not rush and wait for official statements," he said.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said this week that "everything is completely destroyed" in the area due to relentless shelling and weeks of close, house-to-house combat.</p> <p>"The whole land near Soledar is covered with the corpses of the occupiers and scars from the strikes," Zelenskyy said. "This is what madness looks like."</p> <p>Soledar, known for salt mining and processing, lies in the Donetsk region and has little intrinsic value. But it lies at a strategic point 10 kilometers (6 miles) north of Bakhmut, which Russian forces are aiming to surround.</p> <p>Taking Bakhmut would disrupt Ukraine's supply lines and open a route for Russian forces to press toward Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, key Ukrainian strongholds in Donetsk.</p> <p>Soledar's fall would make "holding Bakhmut much more precarious for Ukraine," Michael Kofman, the director of Russia Studies at the CAN nonprofit research organization in Arlington, Virginia, noted Wednesday.</p> <p>The costly war of attrition, with expected heavy casualties, may make Russia's victory as costly as a defeat, however.</p>

	<p>“I don’t think the outcome at Bakhmut is that significant compared to what it costs Russia to achieve it,” Kofman said in a tweet.</p> <p>The Wagner Group, which now reportedly includes a large contingent of convicts recruited in Russian prisons, has spearheaded the attack on Soledar and Bakhmut.</p> <p>Western intelligence has estimated that the Wagner Group constitutes up to a quarter of all Russian combatants in Ukraine.</p> <p>A success in Soledar and Bakhmut would help Prigozhin, who has openly criticized Russia’s military leadership, to increase his clout at the Kremlin.</p> <p>Russia illegally annexed Donetsk and three other Ukrainian provinces in September, but its troops have struggled to advance. After Ukrainian forces recaptured the southern city of Kherson in November, the battle heated up around Bakhmut.</p> <p>The Institute for the Study of War says Russian forces are up against “concerted Ukrainian resistance” around Bakhmut.</p> <p>“The reality of block-by-block control of terrain in Soledar is obfuscated by the dynamic nature of urban combat ... and Russian forces have largely struggled to make significant tactical gains in the Soledar area for months,” the think tank said.</p> <p>An exceptional feature of the fighting near Bakhmut is that some of it has taken place around entrances to disused salt mine tunnels which run for some 200 kilometers (120 miles), according to western intelligence reports.</p> <p>Several front-line cities in eastern Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk provinces have witnessed intense fighting in recent months.</p> <p>Together, the provinces make up the Donbas, a broad industrial region bordering Russia that Putin identified as a focus from the war’s outset and where Moscow-backed separatists have fought since 2014.</p> <p>Russia’s grinding eastern offensive captured almost all of Luhansk during the summer. Donetsk escaped the same fate, and the Russian military subsequently poured manpower and resources around Bakhmut.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Calif. 600% rainfall average; more on way
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/11/weather/california-flooding-atmospheric-river-wednesday/index.html
GIST	<p>Response crews are busy clearing flooded neighborhoods and crumbled roadways after a powerful storm walloped California with heavy downpours and strong winds, forcing thousands of evacuations – and another round of rain is on the way.</p> <p>Already, storms that battered California in recent weeks have left at least 17 people dead as much of the state received rainfall totals 400% to 600% above average.</p> <p>The rain tapered off in Southern California by Tuesday night, but across the state, more than 6 million people were still under flood alerts as the next in a barrage of atmospheric rivers was forecast to bring heavy rain and potentially more flooding to Northern California beginning Wednesday.</p> <p>It’s the first of four more atmospheric river events – long, narrow regions in the atmosphere that can transport moisture thousands of miles – that are expected to hit California in the next 10 days.</p> <p>The next round of rain is moving in ahead of a large cyclone in the eastern Pacific that is expected to also bring precipitation to the Pacific Northwest by Wednesday night.</p>

“We’re anticipating some very intense weather coming in,” California [Gov. Gavin Newsom said](#) on Twitter Tuesday.

The heaviest rain over the next seven days is expected in northern portions of the state where the National Weather Service is forecasting an additional 5 to 10 inches, with localized higher amounts.

Though none of the coming storms are expected to individually be as impactful as the most recent ones, the cumulative effect could be significant in a state where much of the soil is already too saturated to absorb any more rain and streets are still flooded from previous storms.

“We have had five atmospheric rivers come into California over two weeks,” Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis told CNN. “Everything is wet. Everything is saturated. Everything is at a breaking point and there is more rain coming.”

As another storm looms, many communities are still picking up the pieces.

Parts of Central and Southern California saw intense damage. There were about 150-200 reports of flooding and mudslides across the southern region in 28 hours, National Weather Service Meteorologist Todd Hall said Tuesday.

In the Los Angeles neighborhood of Chatsworth, several people had to be rescued after a sinkhole swallowed two vehicles Tuesday. In Malibu, a massive boulder came crashing down, shutting down a key roadway.

Farther north, another sinkhole was reported Monday in Santa Barbara County’s Santa Maria, where 20 homes were evacuated, [CNN affiliate KEYT](#) reported.

Flooding in Santa Barbara County damaged 10 to 15 homes Monday, according to officials. On the central coast, Santa Cruz County officials reported widespread damage, including a collapsed bridge.

As the storm wrought havoc, around 34,000 residents were ordered to flee their homes, including the entire community of Montecito in Santa Barbara County and 18,600 people in Santa Cruz County, according to [state officials](#).

“The storms hit us like a water balloon exploding and just dropped water down through our rivers and creeks. So it’s been this excessive amount of flooding – it’s been the cycles over and over again,” Santa Cruz County spokesman Jason Hoppin told CNN. “It’s really kind of wearing on the community.”

Hoppin said 131 homes in the county received significant damage, but could be salvaged, while five others are not salvageable.

As evacuation orders were lifted, some residents returned to flooded homes and mud-covered neighborhoods.

In the Felton Grove neighborhood of Santa Cruz County, residents have had to evacuate twice due to major flooding as the San Lorenzo River swelled, [CNN affiliate KGO](#) reported. Residents were busy Tuesday shoveling mud out of their garages and driveways.

“It’s great living on the river. It’s not so great living in the river – there’s a big difference,” one resident told the station. “We were expecting a flood, but not like this”

While heavy rain, flooding and mudslides from the most recent storm were easing Tuesday night, the next round of moisture is set to impact the Bay Area beginning Wednesday morning, when more watches will likely be issued.

	<p>Northern California's respite from the rain will be much shorter than the Southland's as the new atmospheric river impacts areas from San Francisco northward Wednesday and Thursday.</p> <p>It is expected to be followed by a storm this weekend, another event early next week and yet another by the middle of the week. The final three are expected to have more widespread impacts across the entire state.</p> <p>As the most recent round of moisture moves inland, winter weather alerts were issued for six western states, including Utah, Colorado, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. The lower elevation areas could see 4-12 inches of snowfall with higher elevations potentially seeing 1-2 feet.</p> <p>Winter storm warnings also remain in place for the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range, where 2-7 inches of snowfall are possible.</p> <p>Though the series of atmospheric rivers have plagued California with flooding, mudslides and power outages, they have also brought beneficial snow to the Sierra Mountains.</p> <p>The eastern Sierra is now at a record value for snow water equivalent for this date and is higher than the median peak usually seen in March, according to the weather service.</p> <p>Areas across the mountains have seen widespread amounts of one to three feet of snow in recent days, with Mammoth Mountain, California, picking up 54 inches.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 NLEOMF: 226 law enforcement died 2022
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/2022-law-enforcement-officers-covid-deaths/
GIST	<p>In 2022, 226 law enforcement officers died in the line of duty, according to preliminary data compiled by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF), showing a significant drop over 2021 — and much of the decrease is attributed to the dramatic reduction in deaths from COVID-19.</p> <p>Last year, 70 law enforcement officers died in the line of duty as a result of contracting COVID-19, an 83% drop, compared to the 405 officers killed in 2021. Despite these steep reductions, COVID-19 remains the number one cause of law enforcement deaths in 2022.</p> <p>"While America's law enforcement officers are still battling the deadly effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a significant reduction in such overall deaths, likely attributed to reduced infection rates and the broad availability and use of vaccinations," the new report by the NLEOMF indicated.</p> <p>In total, 226 law enforcement officers died in the line of duty in 2021, according to data surveying federal, state, tribal and local law enforcement and released Wednesday. Of those, 64 officers were shot and killed in the line of duty in 2022, the same number killed by firearms in 2021.</p> <p>"This continues a disturbing trend of an increase in firearms related deaths compared to the average number of officers killed by gunfire each year in the prior decade," the report indicated.</p> <p>"Although the numbers remain the same in 2022 as in 2021, the impact can be seen when you compare this decade to the prior decade," said Marcia Ferranto, CEO of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. "If you look at 2010 [compared] to 2020, we're up 21% in firearms related fatalities within law enforcement. Ferranto added that the increase will be a focus for the organization, which develops officer safety and wellness programs designed to educate the over 18,000 law enforcement agencies nationwide on best practices.</p>

Currently, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund does not include in its statistics officers who died by suicide, [despite mounting evidence of work-related PTSD among law enforcement](#).

For its part, the FBI began collecting information last year for a new database intended to track the growing suicide rate within the nation's law enforcement ranks.

In November, President Biden signed into law the Public Safety Officer Support Act, expanding death and disability benefits to include law enforcement who die by suicide or are disabled by traumatic experiences.

According to the nonprofit organization Blue HELP, 180 officers died by suicide in 2022. Ferranto said that while NLEOMF supports the law's passage, the organization has yet to add the names of officers who have died by suicide to its memorial.

"Our stringent review process is probably stricter than any other organization in the country, and we do not include suicides as line of duty deaths. With that being said, we are looking at the newly signed legislation and we are having conversations around it."

The new data follows the commemoration of National Law Enforcement Appreciation Day, Monday, and comes just days after President Biden honored fourteen individuals, including law enforcement officers, with the Presidential Citizens Medals for safeguarding the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

In a White House ceremony, Friday, Mr. Biden granted the award to Capitol Police officer Harry Dunn, former Metropolitan Police Department officer Michael Fanone, and Capitol Police officer Eugene Goodman. The late Capitol Police officer [Brian Sicknick](#), who suffered multiple strokes and died the day after responding to the Capitol riot, also received the medal posthumously.

"I urge our workforce all the time to do their best to block out the noise and stay focused on the mission—the people we do the work for and the people we do the work with," FBI Director Christopher Wray [wrote in an op-ed](#), last week, demanding "respect for cops."

"If we're going to continue to attract dedicated public servants to this calling, we all need to be more outspoken in our support of the brave men and women who sacrifice so much to keep others safe," Wray added.

"To demonize law enforcement and to think that is not going to have a direct impact on our communities is an absolute mistake," Ferranto stated. "Our government leaders need to stand behind the men and women who have chosen this profession."

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HEADLINE	01/11 Flight delays: FAA computer outage
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/11/flight-delays-us-after-faa-computer-outage/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — Flights are being delayed at multiple locations across the United States after a computer outage at the Federal Aviation Administration.</p> <p>At around 6:30 Eastern, there were 760 delays within, into or out of the United, according to the flight tracking website FlightAware.</p> <p>The agency said in a tweet that it was working on restoring its Notice to Air Missions System.</p> <p>“We are performing final validation checks and reloading the system now,” the FAA said. “Operations across the National Airspace System are affected.”</p> <p>The FAA is working to restore what is known as the Notice to Air Missions System.</p>

	<p>NOTAMs used to be available through a hotline but that was phased out with the internet. The alerts span from mundane information about construction at airports to urgent flight restrictions or broken equipment.</p> <p>The agency said that it would provide frequent updates as it made progress.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Way forward for public health
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2023-01-10/covid-mpox-misinformation-the-way-forward-for-public-health
GIST	<p>The recently concluded year was one rife with challenges but also signs of promise for the nation’s public health workforce.</p> <p>Those in the field can look back on a 2022 that saw continued COVID-19 activity combined with other respiratory menaces – namely, an early resurgence of influenza and cases of RSV that have strained hospital capacity.</p> <p>Meanwhile, health departments had to face additional threats typically more remote to Americans. Since the first case of mpox, formerly known as monkeypox, in the country was reported in May, nearly 30,000 people have contracted the disease and 20 have died. A recent measles outbreak in Ohio and the first known case of polio in the U.S. in nearly a decade also kept the nation’s already overburdened public health network on alert.</p> <p>“This year in particular, what’s occurred in public health showed us the risks of continued threats from around the world,” says Lori Freeman, CEO of the National Association of County and City Health Officials.</p> <p>Across the U.S., those concerns have been compounded by increased public scrutiny of health officials and their work, as well as an erosion of trust in the institutions they represent.</p> <p>Polling from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that 52% of Americans in early 2021 said they had “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of trust in recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, while only 37% said the same regarding the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration. Only 44% of Americans said they had a lot of trust in their local health department, and 41% shared the same sentiment about their state health department.</p> <p>Survey results published in February by the Pew Research Center found that the share of American adults who said they had “a great deal” of confidence in medical scientists to act in the best interests of the public fell from 43% in April 2020 to 29% in December 2021. Pew polling also found that only 52% of adults this past May believed public health officials like those at the CDC were doing an excellent or good job responding to COVID-19, down from 79% in March 2020.</p> <p>“Trust in government was low before the pandemic, and now it’s even lower, so it’s going to take time and intentionality to build that trust back,” says Brian Castrucci, president and CEO of the de Beaumont Foundation, an advocacy and charitable organization committed to improving community health.</p> <p>Some public health leaders believe “pandemic fatigue” has played a large role in the declining confidence in public health officials, which in turn has likely fostered less willingness to adhere to preventive measures aimed at stemming the spread of COVID-19.</p> <p>While the nation’s seven-day average daily count of people who’d received a COVID-19 bivalent booster dose stood at a high of nearly 613,000 for the period ending Oct. 14, it was less than half that, at under 250,000, in late December. Nearly every week of late, the CDC is reporting well over 2,000 deaths in connection with COVID-19.</p>

But experts also fear there's more to the problem than just pandemic weariness, with a heightened politicization of public health – fueled by misinformation and disinformation – leading to heightened hostility toward health officials, a growing resistance to public health guidance, and the enactment of state policies that could hinder efforts to prepare for and respond to future disease threats.

“The operating environment for public health has gotten increasingly hostile,” says Dr. Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association. “I think fundamentally, public health has been used as a tool for people with political motives to use it as a punching bag.”

Yet Benjamin and others believe as well that the current environment should serve as a wake-up call for public health departments to rethink how they communicate with Americans. They say rebuilding people's trust in the health information they receive requires strategies that focus on establishing and maintaining a consistent dialogue, while also acknowledging and addressing people's health concerns.

“From a public health standpoint, I think that clear, transparent communication is going to be the cornerstone to regaining the trust of the American people,” says Dr. Sterling Ransone, board chair of the American Academy of Family Physicians. “We have to do this – it's not a matter of if we should – it's something we have to do.”

Leveraging the Spotlight

As health officials work to strengthen their messaging, they're having to confront another worrying reality: A total of 185 laws limiting public health protections were enacted in U.S. states from January 2021 to late May 2022, according to [a recent analysis](#) by The Network for Public Health Law. Those include measures prohibiting mask or vaccination requirements, [giving public health authority to legislative officials](#), and placing limits on governor-enacted emergency orders.

Vaccine backlash and hesitancy is also apparent outside of COVID-19: Results from a recent Kaiser Family Foundation [survey](#) found 71% of adults most closely aligned with the sentiment that healthy children should be required to be vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella to attend public school, compared with 82% in 2019.

Meanwhile, the share of U.S. adults who believed harassing public health officials due to business closures during the pandemic was justified increased from 20% in November 2020 to 25% in July and August 2021, [an analysis](#) showed. A [separate study](#) identified nearly 1,500 reports of harassment across local health departments in the U.S. from March 2020 to January 2021, and found that approximately one-third of [222 public health officials](#) who left their positions during that period had experienced harassment.

“We've gone through a couple of years now where public health messaging has been intertwined with things like freedom and the ability to choose to wear masks or get vaccinated,” Freeman says. “It didn't always used to be like that – public health messaging was purely public health messaging and people trusted it for the most part.”

Going forward, Freeman says, public health officials will have to find ways of connecting with people that allow them to cross politically ideological divides. She says a big part of that effort will require health departments to engage in more community outreach to find trusted local partners that can assist in conveying important information.

Officials also may need to build up trust in their own right by increasing their public profile. Dr. Allison Arwady, commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health, acknowledges becoming a more public figure can be counterintuitive for many health officials, who may previously have measured the effectiveness of their work by their ability to remain unnoticed.

But during the pandemic, she says, she felt it was important to maintain a visible presence as a source people could rely on for health information.

“We do not like the spotlight by definition,” Arwady says. She notes that “I’m as tired of COVID as everybody else in this country.”

“But I also know that it remains something that people are worried about and it’s an opportunity to broaden the conversation to say, ‘Let’s think about how this work overlaps with the other really critical issues that the health department has long been working on.’”

In addition to holding press conferences to provide updates on COVID-19 activity, Arwady says a large part of her health department’s communication strategy involves leveraging social media by holding COVID-19 question-and-answer sessions with the public over Facebook. Her team also monitors local social media traffic to identify positive sentiments, as well as trending posts involving health concerns or misinformation.

Arwady acknowledges some of the questions she receives can be aggressive from people who do not share her beliefs about things like the benefits of vaccination or masking up, but she feels it’s important to have an open dialogue with those who hold opposing views to better understand the kind of information they’ve received that has shaped those views.

“Anybody who at this point, three years into COVID, is signing into a live Facebook presentation from someone who every week is answering questions, (is) really interested in this and they are probably putting a fair bit of energy out into the social media universe around this,” Arwady says. “So, we really just try to have a lot of transparency and a lot of data-focused ways of understanding what the conversation looks like here in Chicago, and then building our own social content to kind of refute some of that.”

Key to the [Chicago](#) health department’s increased social media presence has been an expansion of its communications staffing. The department has added a dedicated social media producer and formed marketing and community engagement teams, thanks to funding from the federal government’s response to COVID-19.

“Perhaps the most useful new position I have at the health department is a graphic designer – somebody who can take our content and quickly turn it into productive, local social media,” Arwady says. “I see this kind of infrastructure as absolutely critical to a successful public health department.”

Arwady also says she sees her department’s efforts to increase its engagement with the public on COVID-19 as an opportunity to talk about other important issues like mental health, substance abuse and environmental health.

“I don’t want people to forget about the critical, behind-the-scenes work that public health does,” Arwady says.

Despite the challenges, experts are optimistic that actions taken by the Biden administration to improve the country’s public health infrastructure will help health departments make the investments they need to rebuild public trust.

In November, the [CDC awarded \\$3 billion](#) – part of the [American Rescue Plan](#) passed by Congress and approved by President Joe Biden in 2021 – to help state and local health departments build up their workforces.

“If that money is spent wisely, it has the potential to improve public health in a sustainable way,” says Castrucci, of the de Beaumont Foundation.

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SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2023-01-10/some-school-mask-mandates-make-a-temporary-return-as-covid-19-flu-and-rsv-spread
GIST	<p>An increasing number of school districts are requiring students to wear masks as they return from winter break, but the number is just a fraction of what it once was during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>With COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, spreading, several schools this week began temporarily implementing masking rules after the holidays likely increased travel and gatherings.</p> <p>Public schools in Ann Arbor, Michigan, joined the growing list on Sunday, with Superintendent Jeanice Kerr Swift announcing a Jan. 9-20 mask mandate for school students, staff and visitors.</p> <p>"During this time of return from travel and social activities, the requirement of masks while indoors at school is a measure to reduce the spread of respiratory illnesses and related absenteeism and to prioritize health and in-school learning, particularly at this transition time following the winter break," Kerr Swift said. "We all understand the critical importance of our students and staff being present for in-school learning on every day possible."</p> <p>Masks were among the most visible – and the most contentious – of mitigation measures during the height of the pandemic. Their use was heavily politicized, complicating the adoption of the basic precaution and likely prohibiting a return of any but targeted, local directives that they be worn.</p> <p>School districts in Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania have also implemented similar mandates.</p> <p>Chelsea Public Schools in Boston did not list an end date for its mask mandate, with its superintendent saying that “masks must be worn in school buildings at all times except when eating or drinking.”</p> <p>School districts in New Jersey and Pennsylvania last month alerted students they would be bringing back masking rules after the break.</p> <p>"I know this is a relief to some, and a frustration to others. No matter what your position may be, I ask for your cooperation," New Jersey's Paterson school district Superintendent Eileen Shafer wrote in a letter.</p> <p>"Please continue to maintain universal masking throughout our buildings and we encourage you to take all other precautions against the spread of the COVID-19, RSV, flu virus including frequent hand washing, avoiding large gatherings, and staying home when sick."</p> <p>Although it did not implement a mask mandate, Chicago Public Schools asked students and employees to test themselves for COVID-19 before entering classrooms.</p> <p>"In order to keep our school communities safe, please test for COVID-19 before returning to school," the notice stated. "If you test positive, please report the positive test using the COVID-19 Self-Reporting Form, and follow the guidance outlined on our safety page."</p> <p>Despite several respiratory viruses spreading, the number of schools implementing mask mandates is nowhere near what it was at previous points in the pandemic. The trend highlights a continued movement away from public health mitigation measures as more Americans appear ready to resume pre-pandemic life despite increasing COVID-19 cases and deaths.</p> <p>The majority of the country – 75% of counties – is experiencing a “high” level of COVID-19 transmission, according to the CDC. But only 20% of counties are considered to be under a CDC recommendation to wear masks while indoors in public areas under the agency’s “community levels,” which is the guidance it adopted in February that diverges from transmission levels.</p> <p>“CDC continues to recommend masking for anyone choosing to travel by plane, train, bus or other form of public transportation, or for anyone who may be immunocompromised or increased risk of severe disease,” CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said during a call with reporters in December.</p>

HEADLINE	01/10 Oil and gas is back and booming
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/oil-and-gas-are-back-and-booming-11673363006?cx_testId=3&cx_testVariant=cx_165&cx_artPos=1&mod=WTRN#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>Chesapeake Energy Corp. was one of the biggest stars of the fracking boom, riding high for years on its ability to tap vast troves of American natural gas.</p> <p>By the summer of 2020, the pandemic and lockdowns had caused revenue to dry up, and the company, after a big, ill-timed expansion, filed for bankruptcy protection.</p> <p>Yet last year, Chesapeake racked up \$1.3 billion of profit in the first nine months. It sent its shareholders \$800 million in dividends over that same period. Its stock has more than doubled since the company re-listed its shares in early 2021.</p> <p>Thanks to a mix of events, from the Russian invasion of Ukraine to the U.S. economic recovery, fossil fuels are showing surprising resilience, despite President Biden's push to transition to clean energy and the industry's own history of boom-bust investing and heavy reliance on debt.</p> <p>U.S. production of natural gas—Chesapeake's focus—has hit record levels. The country's crude oil production remains shy of the 2019 level but is otherwise at a peak. Exports of both gas and crude are hitting new highs, easily outpacing overseas sales of aircraft, pharmaceuticals, food and cars. Exxon Mobil Corp.'s shares rose 80% last year.</p> <p>The Biden administration has limited drilling on federal lands, but oil and gas companies have tapped the nation's vast private shale reserves to drive production higher.</p> <p>As surging global demand for U.S. oil and gas has fueled high profit margins for producers, Mr. Biden has accused them of profiteering during a crisis. They take a different lesson from their fortune. "What's really happened is the world has realized there is a need for hydrocarbons in energy policy," said Domenic Dell'Osso, Chesapeake's chief executive.</p> <p>Chesapeake recently put a seventh drilling rig to work in the Haynesville basin, a giant natural-gas field straddling east Texas and northwest Louisiana that has also known booms in the past. In all, 69 drilling rigs were operating there in early January, compared with 32 in the summer of 2020. The local economy is cashing in.</p> <p>This boom is different from earlier ones. In gas-production surges during the decade before 2020, many drillers expanded at a breakneck pace, loading up with debt to do so. They rushed into the Haynesville region when gas prices rose, but just as quickly packed up when prices fell, taking away the jobs, tax revenue and landowner royalties.</p> <p>This time, domestic and international forces have the companies betting on steady demand for Haynesville gas for several years at least. In addition, their shareholders are insisting they return more of their profit to investors instead of using it to expand. It's a strategy that has positioned them to better handle swings in commodity prices, executives and analysts say.</p> <p>Another difference: The windfall for producers is largely coming from exports, which limits the extent to which the increased production translates into lower prices for American consumers.</p> <p>Warm winter weather recently pushed natural-gas prices under \$4 per million British thermal units, but analysts and executives expect exports to keep prices elevated for years to come.</p> <p>Among the reasons: There isn't enough pipeline capacity to send more gas from Appalachia's gas fields to populous areas such as the Northeast. By contrast, it isn't difficult to move large amounts of gas from a</p>

place such as the Haynesville basin to terminals on the U.S. Gulf Coast for shipping it in liquefied form [to a Europe cut off by Russia](#).

In northwestern Louisiana's DeSoto and Caddo parishes, roads are bustling with trucks, and workers have filled RV parks. "There's a lot of work for everybody right now," said Marcos Arellano, a worker on a rig operated for Chesapeake by [Independence Contract Drilling](#).

Mansfield, La., had roughly a 25% increase in sales-tax revenue in 2022, said Mayor Thomas Jones. The bounty enabled the town of 4,700 to afford a \$2,000 payment to each of 62 municipal employees and to spend about \$250,000 for a fire truck, he said.

At the local Comfort Inn & Suites, the influx of workers has meant \$2,500 to \$3,000 more monthly revenue than a year ago, said general manager Ba'Sha Adger.

And hefty royalty checks have started landing in the mailbox of Jim May, a 74-year-old landowner. On property he leases to [Southwestern Energy](#) Co. and Aethon Energy Management, the companies drilled 11 new wells in 2022 and re-fracked three aging ones. Mr. May took in \$2.5 million of royalty from roughly five months of new gas production, he said.

Chesapeake produced 1.6 billion cubic feet of gas a day in the Haynesville during the third quarter of 2022 and says it plans to modestly increase production in 2023. Competitor [Comstock Resources](#) Inc., majority-owned by Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, has also said it was drilling more there.

Chesapeake, co-founded in 1989 by the charismatic wildcatter Aubrey McClendon, was among the first operators to recognize that horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing could unlock troves of natural gas.

As the company drew gas from tight shale formations in Louisiana, Texas and Appalachia, it also took on billions of dollars of debt to build a position of millions of acres on which it leased mineral rights. Other producers followed, so that by early 2011 more than 160 drilling rigs dotted the Haynesville, bringing prosperity to a historically poor area.

Then, a series of disasters struck. Overproduction drove down gas prices, prompting Chesapeake to further diversify its production mix to include crude oil in Texas and Oklahoma, shed a significant chunk of its oil and gas assets and slash gas drilling. Other producers also wound down gas operations in the region, an economic whiplash for the small businesses catering to the drillers.

Activist investors including Carl Icahn took issue with Mr. McClendon's risk-taking and free-spending ways, and ousted him as CEO in 2013. Three years later, Mr. McClendon died in a car crash, a day after being indicted on federal price-fixing charges, which he denied. No link was found between the death and the indictment.

Gas prices slightly rebounded in 2017-18 but slumped again going into the pandemic, sending Chesapeake and dozens of others into bankruptcy court.

Behind the company's push back into the Haynesville now is a bet that the U.S. and the rest of the world won't be able to unwind quickly their dependence on fossil fuels, and especially on natural gas, which many in the industry say could be a bridge to a future in which renewables dominate.

"If we're going to shift away from fossil fuels, we need to identify the exit strategy, we can't just veer off the road," said Timothy Fitzgerald, a Texas Tech economics professor who was an energy adviser to former President Donald Trump.

When Chesapeake emerged from bankruptcy in early 2021, management eschewed growth and put priority on cash generation and investor payouts, said Mr. Dell'Osso—a strategy that the large debt loads had made impossible in years past. Chesapeake reduced its debt outstanding by \$7.8 billion through the bankruptcy process.

In 2021, the company acquired Vine Energy Inc., getting hold of additional gas assets in the Haynesville. In August 2022, Chesapeake disclosed a 36-month agreement to supply 300 million cubic feet a day of gas to Golden Pass LNG, an export terminal on the Gulf Coast that is due to come online in 2024.

The U.S. as a whole is on track to double exports of LNG to nearly 24 billion cubic feet a day by 2030, according to S&P Global Commodity Insights. Northeastern U.S. gas fields, such as those in Pennsylvania, don't have large LNG ports nearby, nor extensive pipelines to the Gulf Coast. The result is that much of the supply growth required to export more gas will have to come from the Haynesville, say analysts and gas executives.

The production increases, while good for controlling the U.S. trade deficit, mostly failed to cut domestic energy costs until the recent warm temperatures suppressed heating-fuel demand. Drillers could produce more natural gas for domestic consumption, but there aren't enough pipelines for new volumes, and the gas-delivery system is fragmented, [cutting off some of the country's most populated regions from additional shale-gas](#) supplies. Local [opposition to new pipelines in the Northeast](#) has killed projects to ferry gas from Appalachia to markets farther east, contributing to electricity prices in New England that are typically higher than on the Gulf Coast.

A growing interconnectedness between U.S. natural-gas production and global gas markets means that the supply is fetching higher international prices. Domestic prices are unlikely to return to prepandemic lows of less than \$3 per million BTU in the long term, analysts say. Natural-gas prices topped \$9 at one point in 2022. Last week they slipped under \$4. They're currently about \$3.90.

Chesapeake has returned to its roots with restrained ambitions. Its capital expenditures for the first nine months of 2022 totaled \$1.3 billion, a far cry from the more than \$14 billion the company spent in 2011. The rig count in the Louisiana gas fields, although at its highest point in a decade, remains far below levels in Mr. McClendon's heyday.

Investors have been demanding returns such as dividends and buybacks over growth from an industry with uncertain long-term prospects. "That doesn't mean they won't let them drill, but they will prioritize return of capital," said Robert Kaplan, former president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.

Analysts expect the LNG trade to continue to grow, with several new export terminals expected to be built. "We're pretty bullish on long-term demand for natural gas," said Mr. Dell'Osso.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Disaster damage 2022: \$165B
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/tornadoes-hurricanes-and-wildfires-racked-up-165-billion-in-disaster-damage-in-2022-11673366441?mod=hp_listb_pos5
GIST	<p>The U.S. experienced an average hurricane season, and though among the warmer years on record, 2022 didn't break temperature records for the country as a whole, federal climate scientists said Tuesday. But a series of big disasters, including the deadly Hurricane Ian, pushed damage costs from extreme weather events to about \$165 billion.</p> <p>In its annual national climate assessment, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration listed drought in the western U.S., early and swift-moving wildfires in Alaska, and Hurricane Ian's extensive destruction among the record-setting events of last year.</p> <p>"In the U.S., we have consistently had both the highest total count, more than any other country each year, and the largest diversity of different types of weather and climate extremes that lead to billion-dollar disasters," said Richard Spinrad, NOAA administrator, at a press conference Tuesday.</p>

Making landfall in Florida on Sept. 28 as a Category 4 hurricane, Ian caused damages of an estimated \$112.9 billion. According to NOAA, only two other major storms, Hurricane Harvey in 2017 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005, resulted in more costly harm.

Over the year, [18 disasters](#)—including floods in Missouri and Kentucky, tornadoes ripping through the South, and a [powerful wind storm](#), or *derecho*, whose gusty path across the Midwest downed power lines and damaged buildings—brought \$1 billion or more in damages, according to NOAA.

Overall, the agency calculated that weather and climate disasters last year killed at least 474 people and resulted in damages costing over \$165 billion in total, the third-most costly year since 1980. By comparison, in 2021, disaster damage costs totaled about \$155.3 billion.

Storms and other extreme weather events are costly when they strike developed, population-dense centers, and many more people are living in [areas vulnerable to such events](#), according to NOAA. “We have more exposure, more people, more assets in harm’s way,” said Adam Smith, an applied climatologist at NOAA’s National Centers for Environmental Information.

Last year was the least active hurricane season since 2015, according to Karin Gleason, monitoring section chief at NOAA’s NCEI, and one of only three years since 1950 in which no Atlantic storms formed in August. There were 14 named Atlantic storms last year, on the lower end of NOAA’s [forecast for the region](#). But powerful hurricanes are becoming more frequent: Seven Category 4 or 5 hurricanes have made landfall in the past six years, Ms. Gleason said.

Multiple disasters arriving soon after each other are having compounding effects, NOAA scientists said. “Climate change is creating more, and more intense, extreme events that cause significant damage and often sets off cascading hazards,” said Dr. Spinrad, pointing to the current [rain and flooding in California](#) as an example. “Intense drought followed by devastating wildfires, followed by dangerous flooding and mudslides.”

The annual average temperature across the continental U.S. was 53.4 degrees Fahrenheit, making 2022 the 18th warmest on record. The year prior, 2021, was the fourth-warmest year recorded, with an [annual average](#) of 54.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

There were regional record highs and lows recorded nationwide. Multiple U.S. states saw temperatures in 2022 rise above their annual average. Florida and Rhode Island logged their fifth-warmest years on record; for Massachusetts, it was the state’s sixth-warmest year. Texas broke monthly high-temperature records between April and July, owing to a monthslong heat wave that scorched the southern plains through the spring and summer.

Though there is some fluctuation between individual years, scientists have observed that over decades, global annual temperatures [have been rising steadily](#). The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change declared in 2021 that it was [unequivocal](#) that human activities have warmed the planet.

Since the 18th century, emissions of heat-trapping gases such as carbon dioxide have contributed to this long-term trend of rising global temperature, IPCC scientists said. Global land and ocean temperatures have climbed by 0.14 Fahrenheit degrees on average each decade since 1880, but that rate [has more than doubled](#) since 1981, according to NOAA. The past eight years have been the warmest on record, the European Union’s Copernicus Climate Change Service noted in its analysis of global temperature records [released Tuesday](#).

In 2022, across the U.S., more than 7.5 million acres burned in wildfires, close to the agency’s average, according to the new report. There were some outliers: New Mexico saw its largest fire ever recorded, as the Calf Canyon and Hermits Peak fires lit up more than 341,000 acres in the spring, prompting mass evacuations and [destroying hundreds of homes](#).

	<p>In Alaska, wildfires burned through a million acres by mid-June—earlier and faster than in the past three decades.</p> <p>In October 2022, up to 63% of the country was in drought, making it the largest area impacted by low precipitation since 2012. At least 40% of the country has had 119 weeks of drought, NOAA said, longer than any other continuous dry spell in the records of the U.S. Drought Monitor, the multiagency effort that has tracked precipitation since 1999.</p> <p>“Each year as the drought builds, the impacts get worse and worse,” said Dan McEvoy, a climate scientist at the Western Regional Climate Center in Reno, Nev., who wasn’t involved in the assessment. He noted that some parts of the western U.S., including the Colorado River Basin, have been in a near-continuous period of drought since 2000.</p> <p>In the last weeks of 2022, heavy rains in California and some western states shored up the water reserves of the region through rainfall and mountain snowpack, Dr. McEvoy said. But the winter wet season needs to continue to turn the drought trend.</p> <p>“It is a good sign but we can’t claim victory yet,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 King tides return to Puget Sound
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3776161/king-tides-return-puget-sound/
GIST	<p>The king tides are back along Washington’s shoreline this week and should peak in the Seattle area on Wednesday.</p> <p>But for this round, at least, we are unlikely to see the flood damage that occurred two weeks ago, the last time the king tides hit.</p> <p>King tides are extraordinarily high waves that are based on the alignment between the Earth, the sun, and the moon. In the Puget Sound, they happen at intervals during the late fall and winter.</p> <p>The problem comes when king tides hit in tandem with a low pressure system that brings stormy weather.</p> <p>“When we get king tides combined with a nice strong storm moving through with low atmospheric pressure, the lack of suppression from the air going all the way up into space, and all the surf action — wind, waves, and things like that — can really exacerbate the situation,” said KIRO Newsradio meteorologist Ted Buehner.</p> <p>That is what leads to the widespread flooding that the region suffered in late December. At that time, nearly 50 properties in South Seattle suffered substantial damage when the Duwamish River flooded.</p> <p>Other communities around the Puget Sound region, such as Olympia and parts of Skagit County, suffered flood damage as well.</p> <p>“That series of king tides had much lower atmospheric pressure over our area, less suppression on the ocean surface or the Puget Sound surface itself, and that allowed the tidal anomaly — the difference between that and the predicted high tides — to be a little higher, resulting in a lot of these low-lying areas getting inundated,” Buehner said.</p> <p>This time, however, there should not be that level of flooding, because the king tides are not happening during a time of low pressure and inclement weather. An atmospheric river is on the docket later in the week, but the tides will peak before that point.</p> <p>“This time around, yes, it’s going to be a high tide, but I don’t think you’re going to see nearly as many low-lying areas getting inundated during the high tide period,” Buehner said.</p>

	<p>However, that could change in late January, when the king tides will return again. It is, of course, too soon to say what kind of weather will accompany those tides, but emergency responders are already preparing for the worst.</p> <p>“We’ve identified several locations along the [Duwamish] riverside where we observed the river overtopping during the December 27 event, and we will be strategically placing sandbags at low points along the river to protect against a similar overtopping,” said Seattle Public Utilities General Manager Andrew Lee.</p> <p>Lee noted that Seattle Public Utilities and the Seattle Department of Transportation are also investing \$100 million into longer-term infrastructure solutions to prevent flooding, such as drainage system and road improvements.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Tacoma guaranteed income program ends
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3775818/tacomas-guaranteed-income-program-now-done-success/
GIST	<p>The last Growing Resilience In Tacoma (GRIT) guaranteed income payment was doled out in mid-December, and now participant feedback is in; regardless of what critics say, it appears to have been a success.</p> <p>Over 100 lower-income households in Tacoma were randomly selected to receive \$500 a month for 12 months as part of a research project with the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Guaranteed Income Research.</p> <p>According to Dona Ponepinto, United Way of Pierce County CEO and President, the initiative spawned into a national initiative that includes 100 cities.</p> <p>“This is an evolution of a lot of the work that we are doing in the community right now. United Way [is hoping to] deconstruct poverty and to advocate on behalf of families that are struggling,” Ponepinto said.</p> <p>GRIT was a 12-month program designed to demonstrate how a modest guaranteed income with no-strings-attached cash investments could improve economic stability, housing, mental health, and well-being while also reducing poverty within the community.</p> <p>The main group that the program targeted was a population referred to as ALICE, or Asset Limited Income Constrained, Employed. This group of citizens is especially vulnerable, the study says, and could do with extra income that can be used for different expenses based on different needs without extra bureaucratic oversight.</p> <p>According to the study, about 40% to 41% of family households in Tacoma would be considered ALICE.</p> <p>“Those are families that are always teetering on the edge. They’re working, you know, two or three jobs just to make ends meet. We looked at the City of Tacoma and its health equity index information and selected four zip codes within the city of Tacoma. The biggest part of this is they had to be a single head of household with children up to age 17 or 21, and if they had a disability,” Ponepinto continued.</p> <p>Over 2,000 applications were received for 110 slots.</p> <p>“We engaged the community. We had focus groups,” GRIT Director Abigail Lawson said. “We made sure that we were engaging the community in this process, and we were surprised but not surprised that we got so many applications. Folks told us that there are a lot of families out there struggling.”</p> <p>The \$500 a month came with no strings attached and is non-taxable. Both Lawson and Ponepinto agree the money made a huge difference to the struggling families trying to make ends meet.</p>

	<p>“Being able to put food on the table, cover expenses, like transportation, rent, that sort of thing, makes a difference, and people are not quitting their jobs,” Ponepinto said. “What we’re finding with the research is that people actually increase their employment because they have this small amount of monthly money that gives them an opportunity to catch their breath.</p> <p>“It was an interesting process at first because it is so unheard of, and it’s kind of against the common culture right now, as far as public assistance goes. But it was really fascinating because those initial phone calls or outreach mechanisms, people were really in disbelief around it. We’ve had a couple of recipients say it felt like they were winning the lottery.”</p> <p>Critics of GRIT say giving away money without conditions creates an environment where people want to quit working. Lawson says that is not the case with GRIT. Some of the recipients were able to take classes and learn a new trade or earn certificates to advance their careers. One family was able to pay off debt and qualify for a loan.</p> <p>Lawson said that the families are in a better position than when they started. The goal for GRIT is to take a guaranteed income and apply it beyond just the city of Tacoma. It’s best situated within the state or the federal government.</p> <p>“We work really closely with the statewide advocates designing and supporting a bill that will actually be going through committee this week and over in Olympia,” Lawson said.</p> <p>A report on Tacoma’s pilot program is expected to be published sometime in the summer of 2024.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Conflicting claims about Soledar fate
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/11/russia-ukraine-war-latest-updates-soledar/
GIST	<p>The founder of the Wagner Group, the paramilitary organization used to supplement Russian forces in Ukraine, said Tuesday that his units had seized control of a strategic salt mining town in eastern Ukraine. The claim could not be immediately verified, and Ukraine said late Tuesday that Russia was still trying to seize the town, Soledar, near the city of Bakhmut, where fighting has intensified in recent days. The capture of Soledar would mark an important symbolic victory for Russia, which has faced a number of battlefield setbacks.</p> <p>Yevgeniy Prigozhin made the claim in a statement on Telegram that was carried by Russian news agencies, but he said fighting was still taking place in the town center. The Telegram channel, which is affiliated with Prigozhin’s press service, also posted a photo it said showed Wagner units inside Soledar’s salt mines. Earlier Tuesday, the British Defense Ministry said Russian forces and Wagner fighters were “likely in control of most of the settlement,” but it noted that a complete capture by Russia was probably not imminent because Ukrainian forces held strong defensive lines.</p> <p>Here’s the latest on the war and its ripple effects across the globe.</p> <p>1. Key developments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he has decided to revoke the citizenship of four pro-Russian Ukrainian politicians. One of them, Viktor Medvedchuk, led Ukraine’s most prominent Kremlin-aligned political party and was charged with treason in 2021. “If people’s deputies choose to serve not the people of Ukraine, but the murderers who came to Ukraine, our actions will be appropriate,” Zelensky said Tuesday in his nightly address. • The Pentagon is planning to bring Ukrainian troops to the United States for training on the Patriot missile defense system, U.S. officials said Tuesday. The training will take place at Fort Sill, covering about 145 square miles southwest of Oklahoma City, and could begin as soon as next week. The base is home to the military’s basic Patriot missile defense training program and another curriculum designed to teach U.S. personnel field artillery maneuvers.

- **The U.S. plan to train Ukrainian troops shows “Washington’s de facto involvement”** in the war, Anatoly Antonov, Russia’s ambassador to the United States, [said late Tuesday](#), according to the state-run Tass news agency. He accused the administration of using Ukrainian forces to cause Russia “as much damage as possible on the battlefield.”
- **Canada will purchase a National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System from the United States to donate to Ukraine**, the country’s defense minister said Tuesday. A NASAMS is a short- to medium-range ground-based air defense system that “protects against drone, missile and aircraft attack, with a high success rate,” Canada’s Department of National Defense [said in a statement](#).

2. Battleground updates

- **Russian strikes hit Kharkiv hours after Germany’s foreign minister visited on Tuesday.** The regional governor, Oleh Synyehubov, said a pyrotechnics warehouse was hit, which set off some of its explosives, but no casualties were reported. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock [said](#) she was invited by her Ukrainian counterpart and called Kharkiv “a symbol for the madness of Russia’s aggression and for Ukrainians’ unbreakable will to live in freedom from oppression.”
- **The capture of Soledar by Russian or Wagner forces “would not portend an immediate encirclement of Bakhmut”** because Ukraine would still have control over critical ground lines of communication, the Institute for the Study of War, a D.C.-based think tank, [said in an assessment Tuesday](#).
- **Ukraine’s Defense Ministry disputed claims that Russian and Wagner forces had taken control of Soledar.** “Even after suffering colossal losses,” the ministry [tweeted](#) shortly before midnight local time, Russia is “still maniacally trying to seize Soledar — home to the largest salt mine in Europe.” Wagner has concentrated its most capable forces in the town, according to Serhiy Cherevaty, a spokesman for Ukraine’s armed forces in the east. The group probably “hopes to build on recent marginal tactical gains by committing more elite assets to the area,” the Institute for the Study of War said.

3. Global impact

- **Russia’s fiscal outlook is becoming “increasingly grim,”** and a coordinated price cap on Russian oil is “limiting the Kremlin’s most important source of revenue,” U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen said Tuesday at a bilateral meeting in Washington with Chrystia Freeland, Canada’s deputy prime minister and minister of finance. “While the crude oil price cap has only been in effect for around a month, we have already seen early progress towards both of those goals — with senior Russian officials having admitted that the price cap is cutting into Russia’s energy revenue,” [Yellen said](#).
- **Russia ended 2022 with a [deficit](#) of 3.3 trillion rubles, or about \$47.3 billion,** Finance Minister Anton Siluanov announced Tuesday — one of the worst financial years in the country’s history, as its economy bore the brunt of the high costs of its war in Ukraine and the pain of Western economic sanctions.
- **Russian hackers attempted to disrupt a charity sale of Banksy artwork,** a U.K.-based charity said. The Legacy of War Foundation, which was selling 50 prints by the artist Banksy to raise money for its work in Ukraine, said on its [website](#) that it had been hit with “3,500 hostile attacks from Russian IP addresses.”

4. From our correspondents

[Putin secretly pardoned convicts recruited by Wagner to fight in Ukraine:](#) Russian President Vladimir Putin secretly pardoned dozens of convicts even before they were sent to fight in the war in Ukraine, according to a member of Russia’s Human Rights Council.

The convicts were apparently sent to some of the most dangerous hot spots on the front line, and many were killed, The Washington Post’s Mary Ilyushina reports. About two dozen of them, initially recruited by the Wagner mercenary group in circumvention of Russian law, have now returned home but will probably return to the front in a matter of weeks, according to Russia Behind Bars, a prisoners’ rights group.

HEADLINE	01/11 Schools swamped by unpaid lunch debt
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/01/11/schools-swamped-by-lunch-debt/
GIST	<p>School districts around the country are drowning in students' lunch debt.</p> <p>Three months after the federal government stopped providing free school meals to all public school students, some districts are reporting thousands of dollars in unpaid bills. In one district, the unpaid balance for school meals reached as high as \$1.7 million.</p> <p>This is according to a new survey by the School Nutrition Association, a school food trade group. The organization queried 1,230 school nutrition directors nationwide in November and found that nearly all were concerned about the financial solvency of their meal programs. Though the report did not disclose the names of the districts polled, it said many directors viewed the reimbursement they get from the federal government to subsidize the meals as insufficient to cover costs incurred because of the debt, inflation and labor shortages.</p> <p>"We are experiencing cost increases in food, supplies and labor like we have never seen before, and the meal reimbursement rate is not sufficient to cover the costs," said Katie Wilson, executive director of the Urban School Food Alliance, a nonprofit created by school food service professionals.</p> <p>Schools set their own school lunch fees and can decide what to charge paying families. For students who qualify for free meals, the federal government reimburses schools about \$2.60 for each breakfast and about \$4.50 for each lunch. During the pandemic, the federal government sought to reduce the burden on families by providing breakfast and lunch free of charge to all students regardless of income, reimbursing the schools for the full amount. That program expired at the end of September.</p> <p>Since then, most schools have continued to feed students even when they owe money, leaving them with little recourse to make up for those lost funds.</p> <p>"We are witnessing large negative balances in schools since free meals have been discontinued," Wilson said, adding that some districts are instituting policies where kids with negative balances get alternate, lesser meals.</p> <p>The divided Congress has balked at making universal free meals permanent. A number of bills in the House and Senate have been put forward, but none has passed.</p> <p>Many states have sought to take matters into their own hands, passing new laws to pay schools so that all students can receive free breakfast and lunch. California and Maine have made free meals permanent starting this school year; Massachusetts, Nevada and Vermont have free meals this school year and are hoping to extend the programs; Colorado voters passed such a policy through a ballot initiative in November, but it's not in effect yet; Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Carolina, New York and Maryland all have active campaigns for universal free school meals.</p> <p>Advocates warn a state-by-state approach creates an inequitable environment for schoolchildren around the nation.</p> <p>"The National School Lunch Program is supposed to be a national program, so a child in Alabama should have the same access to meals as a kid in California," said Crystal FitzSimons, director of school and out-of-school time programs for the nonprofit Food Research & Action Center. "The pandemic highlighted how important it is to give all kids access to school meals."</p> <p>"Doing universal school meals state by state is way too piecemeal and will ultimately leave needy students out," said Donna Martin, nutrition director for the Burke County school district in Georgia. She said inflation has made it hard for parents to pay for meals, and when they realize there's no penalty for not</p>

	<p>paying for meals, “that makes them even less inclined to pay.” She said school meal debt in many school districts is much higher than it’s ever been.</p> <p>“School districts are incurring hundreds of thousands of dollars in school meal debt that the school districts’ budgets — not school nutrition — will eventually have to cover. This takes dollars away from teaching and learning,” Martin said.</p> <p>Meal program losses cut into education budgets, limiting funds for teachers, textbooks and technology. Recognizing cost challenges, Congress increased what the federal government reimburses to schools per meal served for this academic year, raising it by 40 cents per lunch and 15 cents per breakfast as part of the bipartisan Keep Kids Fed Act. This is temporary, FitzSimons notes, and could be rescinded next school year.</p> <p>The School Nutrition Association urges Congress to make these increased reimbursement rates permanent and says that without them, new, stricter standards for fat and salt in school meals, eased during pandemic, will be hard to achieve.</p> <p>Other advocates worry about how schools’ efforts to recoup losses will affect students.</p> <p>“Are we here to help kids or punish them,” Wilson asked.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 China braces; Lunar New Year Covid spike
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/11/china-covid-cases-lunar-new-year/
GIST	<p>China, already struggling with a dramatic surge in coronavirus infections after abandoning its “zero covid” policy, is bracing for another spike in cases during the upcoming Lunar New Year period.</p> <p>Traffic authorities forecast some 2.1 billion trips nationwide in the 40 days around Lunar New Year, the first major holiday since the pandemic began during which domestic travel will be possible with minimal restrictions. What has been called the world’s largest annual migration is likely to expand the ongoing outbreak and endanger the many elderly and undervaccinated people in China’s rural areas, experts said, since hundreds of millions of people will travel to see family, many for the first time in three years.</p> <p>Beijing has abandoned mass testing and no reliable nationwide tally of infections is available, but a National Health Commission official told state media Sunday that some 8 percent of China’s cases had moderate to severe symptoms and that demand for intensive care would peak over Lunar New Year, which begins Jan. 22. The central province of Henan estimated that roughly 89 million residents had been infected as of Monday and said that its hospitals were overwhelmed.</p> <p>Investigations by The Washington Post paint a picture of hospital infrastructure under immense pressure, as fatalities soar. Authorities remain worried, with several local governments announcing that while they believe cases have peaked for now, a second wave is coming. Some cities reminded residents to wear masks and urged them to keep group activities small.</p> <p>Liang Wannian, an epidemiologist who is a top adviser to Beijing’s covid response team, admitted that the government was “not well prepared” for the reopening and that many elderly patients had died in the current outbreak.</p> <p>“It came too soon and caused massive infections in a short time, especially among senior citizens who needed to be hospitalized,” Liang told state broadcaster CCTV on Monday. He urged local officials to prioritize the timely treatment of elderly people in rural areas, whom he said were at heightened risk from social activities around Lunar New Year.</p>

While China's urban medical infrastructure has significantly improved in recent years, state media has reported that many rural clinics suffer from a lack of doctors, with some being forced to ration painkillers earlier this month.

Some authorities said that they believe the worst is over, though they are offering scant evidence. Officials in Chongqing, a landlocked metropolis of some 10 million people, said at a briefing Jan. 3 that the peak "should have passed," citing two weeks of declining visits to clinics from patients suffering fevers.

"The number of severe covid cases has hit a plateau and will continue for a while," Gao Yuan, director of the intensive care unit at Renji Hospital in Shanghai, told local media Tuesday.

Health officials have tried to reassure the public by citing the relatively low fatality rate resulting from infection by the omicron variant. Officially, just over 5,200 people have died of covid in China since the beginning of the pandemic, though the World Health Organization has said [Beijing is probably undercounting](#) infections and deaths.

The lack of transparency in the face of a covid surge has prompted unease abroad. Countries such as the United States, Japan and South Korea have [imposed entry restrictions](#) on travelers from China, citing fears about the emergence of new variants. Independent experts say the measures, which include predeparture testing, are probably ineffective, though Seoul reported that more than a fifth of short-term visitors from China who landed in South Korea between Jan. 2 and Jan. 6 [tested positive for the coronavirus](#).

Chinese state media branded the restrictions "ridiculous" and Beijing retaliated by suspending the issuance of short-term visas for Japanese and South Korean citizens. On Wednesday, it also suspended certain transit privileges for people from those countries. The impact from those moves is likely to be limited, since China has not lifted curbs on leisure travel for foreigners.

There were some signs of hope, at least in the medium term. Beijing has [not authorized the mass use of Western-made messenger RNA vaccines](#), which studies have shown are significantly more effective than Chinese homegrown shots at preventing severe illness. But Chinese pharmaceutical firm CanSino Biologics said last week that it was moving an mRNA shot targeting omicron into "trial production" phase after positive data from a mid-stage trial involving 433 people.

Medicine was also becoming more available, at least in major urban areas. When China lifted covid restrictions in December, panicking residents rushed to stockpile medications and test kits. Cold medicine was particularly hard to come by, with supplies in Hong Kong and South Korea also stretched [as Chinese nationals shipped pills home](#).

Officials addressed the shortage by granting expedited approval to more than two dozen generic versions of fever medication and painkillers. Residents in some major Chinese cities wrote on social media that they were finally able to purchase such medication from local pharmacies in January, after weeks of empty shelves.

But Beijing on Sunday also said that it had failed to agree with Pfizer on a price for the Paxlovid oral antiviral, which studies have shown to be [extremely effective in reducing the risk of severe illness](#) for seniors and other at-risk groups. That would mean that state medical insurance stops paying for the medication by late March, significantly reducing the ability of many Chinese to access the drug.

There is a thriving gray market for the medication, according to state media, which reported that scalpers in Beijing were selling it for up to \$7,400 per box. Pfizer supplies the medication to China under a soon-to-expire agreement for about \$340 per pack.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Lawsuits threaten tribal sovereignty
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/equity/2023/01/two-lawsuits-could-threaten-sovereignty-indigenous-nations

GIST

A lawsuit in Washington state and another case before the U.S. Supreme Court are part of a coordinated campaign that experts say is pushing once-fringe legal theories to the nation's highest court and represents the most serious challenge to tribal sovereignty in over 50 years.

Maverick Gaming, which operates 19 card rooms in Washington and casinos in Nevada and Colorado, is challenging a 2020 law that allows sports betting only on tribal lands. The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Washington state, claims the law created a "discriminatory tribal gaming monopoly."

But it goes further, arguing that gaming compacts between Washington state and tribes are based on race and therefore discriminate unconstitutionally against people who run non-tribal casinos. The argument takes aim at the inherent right of tribal nations to govern themselves and at centuries of U.S. law that recognizes tribal governments' political parity alongside their state and federal counterparts.

Advocates and legal experts say that *Maverick Gaming, LLC v. United States, et al.* and other cases like it threaten a return to the Termination Era policies of the 1950s, when the U.S. government sought to end the political status of Indigenous tribes forever.

The most prominent of the cases, argued before the U.S. Supreme Court in November, focuses on the right of Native American families to have preference over non-Native families in the adoption placements of Native kids.

As in the *Maverick* case, the plaintiffs in *Brackeen v. Haaland* claim the preference is based on race, rather than the political sovereignty of tribal nations. A ruling in their favor could fundamentally rewrite the way the U.S. government regards tribal nations, casting policies created by treaty or agreements between sovereign nations in doubt.

"It could have really big impacts on basically every law Congress has passed that has to do with tribes and tribal citizens," said Rebecca Nagle, a journalist, citizen of the Cherokee Nation and host of the "This Land" podcast, which explored the *Brackeen* case in detail. "It's really the legal foundation for the rights of Indigenous nations in this country."

The two cases share a set of underlying arguments based on the idea that federal laws that outline the U.S. government's obligations to Indigenous nations, including the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, violate the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Those bringing the cases argue that such laws are racially discriminatory — against non-Indigenous people.

The political status of tribal nations is laid out in the Constitution and affirmed by hundreds of years of legal precedent. The U.S. government had to negotiate and, in nearly 400 cases, sign treaties with Native American nations because of their political, cultural and military strength. Just as the federal government honors the treaties it has signed with France or Germany, it's bound by those it has agreed to with sovereign Indigenous nations.

"You don't make treaties with a race or an ethnic group," said Daniel Lewerenz, an assistant law professor at the University of North Dakota and attorney with the Native American Rights Fund. "You make treaties with a political entity, with a sovereign."

That relationship — one between political entities — has been how U.S. and European leaders have negotiated with tribal nations since before the country's founding, according to Lewerenz, a member of the Iowa tribe of Kansas and Nebraska.

Old arguments gain ground

The arguments in both the *Maverick* and *Brackeen* lawsuits echo claims made for decades by groups seeking to end tribal sovereignty.

One such group is the Citizens Equal Rights Alliance, which attacks tribal sovereignty on the basis that the federal laws enshrining it discriminate against everyone who isn't a member of one of the U.S.'s 574 federally recognized Native American nations.

"How does the federal government promote tribal sovereignty and not discriminate against the rest of us?" asked Lana Marcussen, CERA's attorney for 25 years.

A 2018 report by the Montana Human Rights Network listed CERA as an anti-Indigenous hate group. (CERA rejects the label.) Travis McAdam, the researcher who authored that report and has been monitoring anti-Indigenous groups for decades, said CERA is the major national advocacy group for a dispersed anti-Indigenous movement mostly made up of small, local groups who focus on specific tribal sovereignty issues like water rights, casinos or hunting and fishing rights.

"Anywhere there is a local organization or community members that are opposing tribes on tribal sovereignty or basically anything, eventually CERA is going to show up," McAdam said. "At its core, the anti-Indigenous movement is about destroying tribal sovereignty, getting rid of tribes and erasing tribal culture."

In effect, CERA has for decades nurtured ideas long rejected by Congress, the courts and a succession of U.S. presidents. But within the current climate of rising extremism and white nationalism, McAdam worries a major ruling would bring them back into the mainstream.

"Anti-Indigenous groups have used those talking points for decades, but the idea that tribal sovereignty and treaty rights somehow penalize nonmembers — that argument fits into mainstream circles now much better than it did a decade ago," McAdam said.

In the Termination Era beginning in the 1950s, the federal government enacted policies based on a viewpoint similar to the one espoused by CERA and Marcussen: that Indigenous people should assimilate into American society and give up their Indigenous identities, and that the rights negotiated in treaties and codified in federal laws were preventing them from doing so.

Congress quickly passed 46 laws terminating 109 tribes around the United States, including 62 in Oregon — more than any other state.

The result was disastrous for Native Americans.

Termination unilaterally dissolved tribal membership and ended the U.S. government's obligations toward terminated tribes, including the services guaranteed in treaties in exchange for land. Termination policies also allowed the government to seize millions of acres of tribal lands rich with minerals and timber.

"The justification for termination was that the federal trust responsibility between the federal government and tribes was holding Native Americans back," Nagle said. "It's just kind of a rinse-and-repeat argument, that equality for Native people is treating Native people the same as everybody else. That's a very coded way to talk about erasing the special trust relationship that the U.S. federal government has with tribes."

Members of suddenly landless tribes scattered, with many moving from their former reservations to cities under federal relocation policies aimed at forcing assimilation. Termination caused dire social disarray and further impoverishment. For the leaders of terminated tribes, it also squashed the ability to prevent such harm.

All three branches of the U.S. government firmly repudiated termination policy in the 1960s and '70s, pushing proponents to the political sidelines. Two presidents from opposing parties refused to enforce termination, the courts reaffirmed treaty rights, and in 1975 Congress replaced it with the current federal tribal policy known as self-determination.

Indigenous leaders and activists pushed for more protections of their rights, and Congress soon passed more laws, including the Indian Child Welfare Act, the Indian Healthcare Improvement Act, and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

And after decades of work, many terminated tribes eventually won back federal recognition of their sovereignty — but not their land, in most cases.

So modern-day efforts to undermine tribal sovereignty ring familiar to people like Lewerenz, the Native American Rights Fund attorney.

“The people who have tried to get whatever it is that Indians have — whether that’s land or fish or children — have always done so by trying to claim the mantle of equality,” Lewerenz said.

Key cases share attorney

Maverick Gaming and Chad and Jennifer Brackeen are also backed by the same legal team.

The Brackeens are challenging ICWA, a 1978 law that requires caseworkers to give preference to Indigenous families in foster and adoption placements of children who are members of a federally recognized tribe.

The law was aimed at correcting centuries of injustice.

Between 1819 and 1969, the federal government took many thousands of Indigenous kids from their homes and forced them to attend brutal schools that employed “systematic militarized and identity-alteration methodologies,” according to a report released by the U.S. Department of the Interior in May.

After the federal government ended mandatory attendance at American Indian boarding schools, officials continued to remove overwhelming numbers of Indigenous kids from their families and place them in foster or adoptive care outside their communities.

When Congress passed ICWA in 1978, studies showed that state child welfare agencies and private adoption companies were taking between 25% and 35% of Native kids from their families. And 85% of those children were placed with non-Indigenous families.

Native families are still four times as likely as white families to have kids removed from their homes, according to the National Indian Child Welfare Association.

But some private adoption companies and evangelical groups argue that the law gives preference to Indigenous people as a racial group and therefore violates the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

The Brackeens, a white couple, sought to adopt a 4-year-old girl in foster care, the baby sister of a boy they had already adopted. Devout evangelical Christians, the Brackeens told The New York Times they saw adoption of foster kids as a way to “rectify their blessings.” The Navajo Nation wanted to place the girl, who is Cherokee and Navajo, with a Navajo family, as laid out by the Indian Child Welfare Act. But when that placement fell through, both Indigenous nations supported the Brackeens’ adoption.

Despite their happy ending, the Brackeens are the lead plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit claiming the act is based on a racial preference that unfairly prioritizes Indigenous families as adoptive parents.

For a child-welfare dispute that started out in a small Texas family court, the *Brackeen* case draws unusual firepower.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton intervened in the case on the couple’s behalf.

And Matthew McGill, an attorney with the high-powered firm Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher who argued the *Citizens United* case before the Supreme Court in 2010, took the Brackeens' case pro bono. He argued on their behalf before the U.S. Supreme Court in November.

His law firm is also known for representing Chevron in the longstanding lawsuit filed by Indigenous communities in Ecuador, as well as Energy Transfer Partners, architect of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The latter proposal has drawn fierce opposition from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, along with the Yankton Sioux, the Oglala Sioux and the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribes, who say the pipeline's route under nearby Lake Oahe threatens their main source of drinking water and could pollute the waters they hold sacred.

McGill also successfully argued the Supreme Court case that led to its 2018 ruling in *Murphy v. National Collegiate Athletic Association* allowing states to legalize sports betting. The firm counts among its clients several major international casino operators.

Two years after McGill's win in the sports betting case, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee signed a bill allowing sports betting only under Washington's tribal-state gaming compacts, setting the stage for the *Maverick* lawsuit.

In January 2022, McGill filed the *Maverick* lawsuit, as well. He did not respond to requests for an interview.

On its surface, the *Maverick* case is connected to his litigation around betting and gaming. But the legal arguments parallel those of the Brackeen adoption case.

Lewerenz said both cases could result in rulings that cast tribes as "merely private associations of people with a common racial ancestry."

"If that happens," Lewerenz said, "then it's hard to understand why they would have any governing power, any political power."

Nagle said that power flows from tribes' unique position as sovereign nations that predate the United States.

"What racial group in the United States has its own land?" she asked. "Its own water rights and environmental regulations? Its own police force, its own elections, its own government?"

Tribes fear they stand to lose almost everything: their right to self-governance, the resources to preserve their culture and traditions, and the main economic engine that provides for basic tribal services.

But for those with interests in the private casino industry, such a change could be a boon. The same goes for corporations looking to develop oil and gas leases without interference from Indigenous nations, whose right to co-manage the lands they stewarded for millennia is increasingly recognized by the federal government.

Gaming change could devastate tribes

The Washington State Legislature authorized gambling only for the state lottery, for tribes, for charitable and nonprofit gaming and, in a much more limited capacity, as a financial boost for bars.

But dozens of non-tribal, for-profit card rooms have expanded the category.

"Those food and beverage establishments have somehow become these massive mini-casinos," said Rebecca George, executive director of the Washington Indian Gaming Association.

That's where *Maverick* stepped in.

Its CEO, Eric Persson, declined repeated requests for an interview. But in press releases and news articles about the lawsuit his company filed, Persson says he supports tribal sovereignty.

In fact, Persson is a member of the Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe, a tiny community located an hour southwest of Hoquiam, Washington, where he grew up. The tribe gave Persson a partial scholarship every semester, according to his spokesman, from undergrad through law school at Georgetown University. Persson is one of over 100 members the tribe estimates it has helped send to college.

Now, the tribe says, his lawsuit could devastate the tribe's ability to provide government services to its citizens — including its scholarship fund.

The Shoalwater Tribe is fighting for survival on several fronts. Its reservation is a tiny piece of land. The single square acre set aside by the U.S. government in 1866 is big enough to house the tribal headquarters and not much else. Rising sea levels caused by climate change have eaten into that territory as the ocean has slurped up houses on what used to be forested land above high tide.

"Half the reservation is underwater," said Larry Kerns, the tribe's chief financial officer.

The tribe is using gaming revenue to painstakingly buy back small chunks of its homelands, including areas atop nearby hills that would be a safer place to live. The tribe now owns nearly 5,000 acres.

"It's our land and we want it back," Kerns said. "Unfortunately, we have to buy it back. They stole it from us, and we have to buy it back."

The Shoalwater tribal government made about \$7 million last year in gaming revenue, according to Kerns. It pays for most of the tribe's governmental services, including education, tribal housing, elders' pensions, child-welfare services, tribal policing and administration.

"Gaming income funds basically everything," Kerns said. "Without it, we'd have to cut our programs by about 70%."

The *Maverick* case threatens it all.

In 2018, the company bought about half the card rooms in the state, adding to the casinos and card rooms it already owned in Nevada and Colorado. Persson immediately launched his campaign to allow sports betting in private clubs throughout the state. Maverick poured millions into a political action committee and lobbied lawmakers in support of a bill in the Washington State Legislature that would allow sports betting in his clubs.

After that bill failed, he tried again with a narrower model, which he said would "level the playing field" between tribal gaming operations and those that are privately owned by non-tribal entities. That bill also failed.

Lawmakers approved gambling in Washington in part to fund essential government services. Just like the state lottery raises money for education, tribal gaming raises money that tribes used to provide their citizens with education, healthcare, natural resources and behavioral health, George said.

"[Persson] has a bottom line that he wants to grow," George said. "But for us, we want to get up to basic standards for our communities, and we still have a long way to go."

Thirty years after the first tribal casino opened in Washington, poverty rates among reservation communities there are improving, because of the jobs casinos create and the government services they fund. But annual incomes among tribal members living on reservations in Washington state average just \$18,600, according to a recent report by the gaming association.

	<p>“Indian gaming has helped a lot,” George said. “But we’re still a good 50% behind the state average for poverty. So there’s still a long way to go.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Record drought gripped US in 2022
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/climate-security/record-drought-gripped-much-of-the-u-s-in-2022-a-year-of-18-billion-dollar-disasters/
GIST	<p>The large coverage and long duration of drought conditions across the U.S. set several records in 2022. The year was also marked by numerous severe weather events, devastating hurricanes and deadly flooding across parts of the country.</p> <p>Here is a summary of the climate and extreme weather events across the U.S. in 2022:</p> <p>Climate by the numbers 2022</p> <p>The average annual temperature across the contiguous U.S. was 53.4 degrees F — 1.4 degrees above the 20th-century average — ranking in the warmest third of the 128-year record.</p> <p>Florida and Rhode Island both saw their fifth-warmest calendar year on record while Massachusetts ranked sixth warmest. Four additional states experienced a top-10 warmest year on record — California, Connecticut, Maine and New Hampshire. Alaska saw its 16th-warmest year in the 98-year record for the state.</p> <p>Annual precipitation across the contiguous U.S. totaled 28.35 inches (1.59 inches below average), which placed 2022 in the driest third of the climate record. Nebraska saw its fourth-driest year on record while California had its ninth driest. Meanwhile, above-average precipitation caused Alaska to have its fourth-wettest year on record.</p> <p>Drought coverage across the contiguous U.S. remained significant for the second year in a row, with a minimum extent of 44% occurring on September 6 and a maximum coverage of 63% on October 25 — the largest contiguous U.S. footprint since the drought of 2012.</p> <p>In the western U.S., drought conditions reached a peak coverage of 91.3% of the region on May 3. Drought coverage across the West shrank as the summer monsoon reduced some of the coverage in the Southwest. The multi-year western U.S. drought resulted in water stress/shortages across many locations in 2022 as some major reservoirs dropped to their lowest levels on record.</p> <p>Last year, the U.S. experienced 18 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters, leading to the deaths of at least 474 people. The following 18 events, each exceeding \$1 billion, put 2022 in third place (tied with 2011 and 2017) for the highest number of disasters recorded in a calendar year, behind 2021 — with 20 events — and 2020, with a record 22 separate billion-dollar events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One winter storm/cold wave event (across the central and eastern U.S.). • One wildfire event (wildfires across the western U.S., including Alaska). • One drought and heat wave event (across the western and central U.S.). • One flooding event (in Missouri and Kentucky). • Two tornado outbreaks (across the southern and southeastern U.S.). • Three tropical cyclones (Fiona, Ian and Nicole). • Nine severe weather/hail events (across many parts of the country, including a derecho in the central U.S.). <p>Damages from these disasters totaled approximately \$165.0 billion for all 18 events. This surpasses 2021 (\$155.3 billion, inflation adjusted) in total costs, which makes 2022 the third most costly year on record, only behind 2017 and 2005; all inflation adjusted to 2022 dollars).</p>

Hurricane Ian was the most costly event of 2022 at \$112.9 billion, and ranks as the third most costly hurricane on record (since 1980) for the U.S., behind Hurricane Katrina (2005) and Hurricane Harvey (2017).

Over the last seven years (2016-2022), 122 separate billion-dollar disasters have killed at least 5,000 people, with a total cost of more than \$1 trillion in damages. Five of the last six years (2017-2022, with 2019 being the exception) have each had a price tag of at least \$100 billion.

An average but destructive hurricane season: During 2022, [14 named storms formed in the North Atlantic Basin](#) (four tropical storms, eight hurricanes and two major hurricanes), which is near the historical average. Several notable storms brought destruction and flooding to portions of the U.S.

Hurricane Fiona brought massive flooding to Puerto Rico, with some areas receiving 12-18 inches of rain. Hurricane Ian, with 150 mph sustained winds, made landfall in southwest Florida resulting in major flooding, damage and loss of life. Later in the year, Hurricane Nicole made landfall along Florida's eastern shore, flooding the coast and knocking out power for hundreds of thousands of people. Nicole was the first hurricane to hit the U.S. during November in nearly 40 years.

An above-average tornado year: The preliminary U.S. tornado count for 2022 was approximately 9% above the 1991-2020 average across the contiguous U.S. with 1,331 tornadoes reported. March 2022 had triple the average number of tornadoes reported (293) and the most tornadoes reported for any March in the 1950-2022 record.

Wildfires scorched the West, Alaska: In addition to the active wildfire year across the western U.S., Alaska saw one million acres burned by June 18 — the earliest such occurrence in a calendar year than any other time in the last 32 years. By July 1, 1.85 million acres had been consumed — the second-highest June total on record and the seventh-highest acreage burned for any calendar month on record for Alaska.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Haiti: no elected government officials
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/10/haiti-no-elected-officials-anarchy-failed-state
GIST	<p>The last 10 remaining senators in Haiti's parliament have officially left office, leaving the country without a single democratically elected government official.</p> <p>The expiration of the officials' terms at midnight on Monday formally concluded their time in office – and with it, the last semblance of democratic order in the beleaguered Caribbean nation.</p> <p>Haiti – which is currently engulfed in gang violence and the worst malnutrition crisis in decades – now officially has no functioning parliament as the senators were the last of 30 to remain in office after successive failed efforts to hold elections.</p> <p>There is now no constitutional representation at any state level, the latest sign that the country has become a failed state.</p> <p>“The constitution, which until now we have been referring to as the framework for political transition, is essentially just a letter, because none of the institutional architecture that it describes is currently in place,” said Renata Segura, deputy director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the International Crisis Group, a peacebuilding thinktank.</p> <p>Haiti is plagued by a series of acute, overlapping crises as gangs violently exploit a power vacuum to expand their control of the capital.</p> <p>Every democratic institution, from Haiti's justice system to parliament, is no longer functioning.</p>

All local authorities' terms expired in 2020 and when the supreme court last met in February 2022, only five of the 12 judges remained in office.

The breakdown of Haitian democracy and its institutions has made it impossible to confront warring factions, who now control an estimated two-thirds of Port-au-Prince.

Home to 12 million, Haiti has not held timely legislative elections since October 2019 and was plunged further into uncertainty when its president, [Jovenel Moïse, was assassinated](#) in July 2021 by Colombian mercenaries in circumstances that remain unclear.

All local and national political mandates have now expired, while questions hang over the constitutional legitimacy of the interim government which has set no dates for the next round of elections.

Moïse had controversially extended his own mandate before he was assassinated and the succession of Ariel Henry – previously the prime minister – has never been ratified by law.

Henry is seen as illegitimate by most Haitians and his request in October for [foreign military intervention](#) was seen by critics as an effort to shore up a weak and unelected government.

“The entirety of the power right now is in the hands of the interim prime minister, who has been appointed in highly irregular circumstances and who is very illegitimate among great proportions of the Haitian population,” said Segura.

The explosion of gang violence engulfing Haiti has caused famine, forced hospitals to close and probably contributed to the re-emergence of cholera.

A record 4.7 million people are facing acute hunger with 1.8 million at a critical level of malnutrition, according to the World Food Programme (WFP).

In October 2022 the NGO for the first time raised its hunger alert in Haiti to level 5, the highest category often reserved for wartime famine.

Henry announced the formation of a council to oversee a transition of power on New Year's Day, which could allow for fresh elections, but the initiative is widely regarded by observers as illegitimate.

Several leading opposition politicians have rejected the agreement and only three of the five-member transition council members have been appointed.

Opposition figures are not interested in a solution with Henry still in the frame, but Moïse's successor shows no willingness to leave office.

“[Henry and his allies] say it's a consensus but it's really bogus. They're going to try to have elections and we're going to be right back at square one again because it's going to be contested,” said Louis-Henri Mars, director of the Haitian peacebuilding non-profit Lakou Lapè.

At a summit in Mexico City on Tuesday Joe Biden was expected to lobby Justin Trudeau for Canada to lead an international security force – in part to help stem the flow of Haitian refugees reaching the US.

Activists in Haiti have warned that any foreign force would be the latest in a long history of miscalculated foreign intervention attempts in the Caribbean.

But a near-term political solution from within Haiti also looks unlikely.

The 10 senators whose terms expired on Monday met irregularly but had no power in practice as parliament was no longer convening.

HEADLINE	01/11 Day 322 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/11/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-322-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The head of Russia's Wagner mercenary group has claimed his forces have completed the takeover of the Ukrainian town of Soledar, which if confirmed would mark Moscow's first major battlefield success since last summer. "Wagner units have taken the whole territory of Soledar under control," said Yevgeny Prigozhin in an audio message released on his Telegram channel late on Tuesday. Soledar, home to huge salt mines, has symbolic, military and commercial value for Russia. • Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy thanked the "heroic" defenders of Soledar but gave no update on the military situation in his nightly address on Tuesday. • Russian forces trained tank, mortar and artillery fire on Avdiivka, Ukraine's armed forces said, a second focus for Russia south of Bakhmut and not far from the city of Donetsk, held by Russian proxies since 2014. • Russia's artillery fire in Ukraine has gone down dramatically from its wartime high, in some places by as much as 75%, according to US and Ukrainian officials. The drop in shelling is further evidence of Russia's increasingly weak position on the battlefield nearly a year into its invasion, officials have told CNN. The officials did not give a clear or single explanation behind the striking decline in artillery fire. • Western officials have warned that Ukraine will not be able to take back a significant amount of territory from Russia without an increase in military capability, including tanks and armoured vehicles. Russian and Ukrainian forces are currently too closely matched for the Ukrainians to be able to mount a major offensive, a western official said on Tuesday. They said a reported Ukrainian call for 300 tanks was "not an unreasonable number" to create the force mass needed for them to go on the attack. • Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday said his government would purchase a US air defence system to donate to Ukraine. The US-built air defence system was worth C\$406m (US\$302m), defence minister Anita Anand said. "Canada will continue to stand with the Ukrainian people as they fight against Russia's illegal and unjustifiable invasion," Anand said. • Ukrainian troops are set to begin training on the Patriot missile system in the US as soon as next week, US officials said. The training programme will take place at Fort Sill in Oklahoma, with the programme expected to take "several months", one said. During Zelenskiy's visit to the US in December, Joe Biden announced \$1.85bn (£1.54bn) in new military assistance to Kyiv, including the delivery of a Patriot missile battery system. The US is also reportedly considering sending Stryker armoured combat vehicles to Ukraine. The move could be announced next week, but no final decision has been made, Politico reported, citing two sources familiar with the matter. • Russia has appointed Colonel-General Alexander Lapin as chief of staff of the country's ground forces, state-owned news agency TASS reported, despite criticism from hawks over his performance in Ukraine. • The family of one of two British men missing in Ukraine have said they are "very worried and concerned" about his health. Chris Parry, 28, was last seen on Friday with fellow Briton Andrew Bagshaw, 48, heading to the town of Soledar in the eastern Donetsk region of Ukraine. The men had been working as volunteers helping people evacuate from the frontline.
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HEADLINE	01/10 Wagner Group claims takeover of Soledar
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/10/head-of-wagner-group-says-his-troops-have-taken-control-of-soledar
GIST	The head of Russia's Wagner mercenary group has claimed his forces have completed the takeover of the Ukrainian town of Soledar, which if confirmed would mark Moscow's first major battlefield success since last summer.

“Wagner units have taken the whole territory of Soledar under control,” said Yevgeny Prigozhin in an audio message released on his Telegram channel late on Tuesday.

Prigozhin said on Tuesday that Ukrainian troops were surrounded in the centre of the town. “There are street battles ongoing. The number of prisoners taken will be announced tomorrow,” he said.

Denis Pushilin, a Russian proxy official in eastern Ukraine, told Russia’s Channel One that Soledar had been taken. “At the current time, according to the information I have, the centre of Soledar is already under the control of Wagner units,” he said.

Prigozhin released a photograph of himself, surrounded by Wagner fighters, in what appeared to be one of Soledar’s salt mines, possibly a deliberate riposte to US officials who have in recent days publicly claimed the controversial businessman is interested in taking over salt and gypsum mines in the area.

It was not immediately possible to verify the location of the photograph and there was no confirmation forthcoming from Ukrainian officials of Prigozhin’s claims, but there had been suggestions in Kyiv and western capitals over recent days that the fall of Soledar was imminent.

The Ukrainian military’s Wednesday morning summary made one mention of Soledar, listing the town as one of several being shelled in the Donetsk region.

Britain’s Ministry of Defence (MoD) said in its daily briefing earlier on Tuesday that much of Soledar was likely to already be under Russian control.

“Part of the fighting has focused on entrances to the 200km-long disused salt mine tunnels which run underneath the district. Both sides are likely concerned that they could be used for infiltration behind their lines,” said the briefing.

In his nightly address on Tuesday, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy thanked the “heroic” defenders of Soledar but gave no update on the military situation.

In his address the previous night, Zelenskiy said Ukrainian troops were withstanding “new and even tougher assaults” on the city, amid speculation he was preparing public opinion for the loss of the town. He said Russian forces had taken huge losses in the battle.

“The area near Soledar is covered with corpses of the invaders ... this is what madness looks like,” said Zelenskiy. He said the town was completely destroyed and that the Ukrainian resilience had won “additional time and strength” for Ukrainian forces.

Beyond Soledar, Russia’s next target is Bakhmut, which Russia has been trying to take since the summer. The capture of the city, which had a prewar population of 70,000 but has been reduced to ruins after months of intense fighting, has become one of Moscow’s main objectives. Ukraine’s robust defence of Bakhmut has also given the city symbolic importance to Kyiv.

“Despite the increased pressure on Bakhmut, Russia is unlikely to envelop the town imminently because Ukrainian forces maintain stable defensive lines in depth and control over supply routes,” said the MoD briefing.

Wagner’s role in the Soledar offensive is likely to deepen a battle for power and influence in the planning of Russia’s invasion. Prigozhin, a St Petersburg restaurant owner who rose to fame as “Putin’s chef” – and until earlier this year denied being behind Wagner – has taken on a much more public role since the invasion.

He has recruited directly from prisons and aimed frequent public criticism at top generals, insisting that his troops are more effective than the regular Russian army.

	<p>“I want to underline once more that no one except for Wagner took part in the storm of Soledar,” said Prigozhin on Tuesday evening.</p> <p>Western intelligence officers believe the Wagner group is playing an increasingly significant role in Russia’s campaign and that, according to one official speaking on condition of anonymity, “there’s a realistic possibility that Wagner personnel now make up a quarter or more of Russian combatants”.</p> <p>However, their military effectiveness in the Bakhmut sector – where their forces are concentrated – is still considered to be limited, with the same official describing the pace of advance as so slow that “sometimes it takes two weeks to take a single house”.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Cuban exodus: US adjusts immigration
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/10/cuban-exodus-us-embassy-havana-immigration-policy
GIST	<p>For almost six years the US embassy in Havana has lain silent in the withering Caribbean sun. Tiles have fallen from its facade, the fence has rusted and the awning of the consular section has been shredded in the fierce winds off the Florida Straits.</p> <p>Last year, though, a new blue awning appeared and US state department SUVs began to arrive. And then, last week, queues of Cubans appeared outside, as the embassy resumed full immigrant visa services for the first time since 2017.</p> <p>Abel Alonso, a cardiovascular technician from Miami, waited in the nearby park with his parents-in-law, Percida and Bildo. “It all depends how fast they issue a visa,” he said. “But they have an appointment and I hope they will be at home with us in a month.”</p> <p>The return of full consular services comes as Joe Biden tries to stem the latest migration crisis on the southern border of the US. The president has announced that 30,000 migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela will be allowed to legally enter the country every month.</p> <p>In the past year 250,000 Cubans – more than 2% of the island’s population – have been detained after attempting to cross the US border illegally. Most migrants from the island travel overland from Central America, but significant numbers attempt the perilous crossing by boat, with 300 picked up in the Dry Tortugas national park near Key West last week. The exodus shows no sign of tailing off.</p> <p>Biden has said that those attempting to cross to the US illegally will now be stopped, strengthening Trump-era policies that have turned away migrants from Haiti and the rest of Latin America, but – until now – not Cubans.</p> <p>Migrants from the island have long had privileged access to the US, but in recent years those privileges have gradually been whittled away. In 2017 Barack Obama ended the so-called wet foot/dry foot policy that gave any Cuban who managed to put a foot on US territory a route to residency (in contrast with Haitian migrants, who were routinely returned home no matter where they were detained).</p> <p>Another blow came with the closure of the US embassy’s consular section after 26 officials reported falling ill after mysterious debilitating “sonic attacks”.</p> <p>The Cuban government unambiguously denies any involvement in the alleged attacks, but the closure meant that Cubans wishing to apply for legal entry to the US had to go instead to Guyana on the north coast of South America.</p> <p>Cristina Suárez used that route to bring her teenage stepdaughter to the US.</p> <p>“Because of the pandemic there were few flights,” she said. “In the end we paid about \$6,000 [to get her to Guyana]. That cost excluded a bunch of people whose family cannot pay that sort of money.”</p>

Meanwhile Cuba's already moribund economy nosedived during the pandemic, and the Trump administration used the moment to strengthen the 61-year-old US economic embargo and exert "maximum pressure" on the island's communist government.

Queues for food and medicine appeared. In July 2021, rare mass protests flared – only to end in mass arrests. In November 2021, Nicaragua opened its doors to Cubans and large numbers flew to Managua to begin the journey north, aided by coyotes – people smugglers.

Rosa Miriam Elizalde, vice-president the Cuban Union of Journalists, wrote last week in Mexico's La Jornada that the US's "maximum pressure" policy on Cuba had only led to "chaos" on its own border. "Instead of taking to the streets, 250,000 well-educated and well-resourced Cubans left the island to fulfil their dreams somewhere other than a bullied Caribbean island," she wrote.

Alejandro Amaro is one example. In 2019 he received a visa to complete a master's degree in Latin American literature in Mexico. But when Cubans started flying to Nicaragua, he crossed the US border in Mexicali with his wife and two friends "to get ahead of the wave", paying a coyote \$650 a head.

"I knew I wasn't going to return to Cuba and I never felt comfortable in Mexico," he said. After nearly two weeks in US detention, he was released to pursue a claim of political asylum.

Like many Cubans, he went to Hialeah in the Miami metropolitan area, where friends found him off-the-books work for a telecommunications company.

Amaro is one of those referred to by Alejandro Mayorkas, the US homeland security secretary, last week: "Immigration judges have a backlog of more than 1.7m cases, and we have more than 11 million undocumented people in our country, many of whom work in the shadows."

Last November, US and Cuban officials met to resume deportation flights that the pandemic had halted. For the US, these are an important tool to deter migrants, but furious returnees pose potential risks for the Cuban authorities. No flights have yet departed, although Cubans attempting to cross by sea have long since been repatriated.

Meanwhile in Cuba, people continue to tell one another stories of friends and relatives making their way to the US. Cuba's GDP remains 8% below pre-pandemic levels and inflation has taken hold.

In December, Cuba's president, Miguel Díaz-Canel, gave a speech to the island's national assembly, saying: "2023 will be a year of struggle and hope." Meanwhile in Miami, Amaro said he wished he had waited to travel legally, that he is struggling with two badly paid dead-end jobs for little money, but "at least here, I've got hope".

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HEADLINE	01/10 UK probe: uranium seized at Heathrow
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/10/counter-terrorism-police-investigate-after-uranium-seized-at-heathrow
GIST	<p>Counter-terrorism police have launched an investigation after Border Force officials seized material containing uranium at Heathrow.</p> <p>Scotland Yard confirmed its counter-terrorism team was investigating after the contaminated material was discovered as part of a routine security screening.</p> <p>It was discovered on 29 December on a passenger flight that arrived from Oman, according to the Sun. It is understood the package originated from Pakistan and was destined for an Iranian business with premises in the UK.</p>

	<p>“I want to reassure the public that the amount of contaminated material was extremely small and has been assessed by experts as posing no threat to the public,” said Commander Richard Smith of the Met.</p> <p>“Although our investigation remains ongoing, from our inquiries so far it does not appear to be linked to any direct threat. As the public would expect, however, we will continue to follow up on all available lines of inquiry to ensure this is definitely the case.”</p> <p>Uranium is a natural metal that exists in the earth but can be dangerous to humans because it is an essential nuclear element.</p> <p>The said it had not made any arrests and is working with partner agencies to investigate and ensure there is no risk to the public.</p> <p>“However, it does highlight the excellent capability we and our partners have in place to monitor our ports and borders in order to keep the public safe from any potential threats to their safety and security that might be coming into the UK,” Smith said.</p> <p>A Met spokesperson said: “We can confirm officers from the Met’s counter-terrorism command were contacted by Border Force colleagues at Heathrow after a very small amount of contaminated material was identified after routine screening within a package incoming to the UK on 29 December 2022.”</p> <p>It is understood that the Home Office does not believe there is any threat to the public.</p> <p>A Home Office spokesperson said: “We do not comment on live investigations.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Uganda: end of deadly Ebola outbreak
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/uganda-declares-end-of-deadly-ebola-outbreak-11673427283?mod=hp_lead_pos13
GIST	<p>KAMPALA, Uganda—Uganda’s Ebola outbreak is over, the country’s health ministry said Wednesday, capping a nearly four-month struggle to contain a rare strain of the highly contagious virus for which there are no proven vaccines or antiviral treatments.</p> <p>Uganda’s Health Ministry said 42 days had passed since the last known patient diagnosed with the Sudan strain of Ebola was discharged from a hospital, taking the country beyond twice the virus’s maximum incubation period. Fifty-five people are confirmed to have died from the virus since September in the second-deadliest known Ebola outbreak in Uganda’s history, while at least 142 were infected. The ministry said another 22 people are believed to have died from the virus as far back as early August, but were never tested.</p> <p>Strained by steep budget cuts due in part to the expense of responding to the coronavirus pandemic, Uganda’s healthcare system struggled to contain Ebola infections in the early months of the outbreak. Trainee doctors and other health workers went on strike complaining about delayed salaries and a lack of protective equipment.</p> <p>The World Health Organization, which sent dozens of health workers as well as medical supplies and equipment to support the response, hailed Uganda for combating the outbreak, especially in the absence of vaccines or therapeutics.</p> <p>“Health authorities worked intensely, ramping up outbreak control measures that helped to halt the virus in less than four months,” said Patrick Otim, who oversaw the WHO’s outbreak response. “Evidence-based decision-making, partnerships and collaboration between the government, its partners, health workers and the community have been key success factors in the response.”</p>

The virus was first detected in the central farming district of Mubende in September and spread to at least nine different districts, [including Kampala, Uganda's capital of 3 million residents](#). Health officials were concerned that the virus could spill into neighboring Rwanda, Burundi and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, whose economies, already some of the poorest in the world, are struggling to recover from pandemic-related disruptions and the fallout from [Russia's invasion of Ukraine](#).

In November, the U.S. restricted arrivals of travelers from Uganda to five airports to allow for extra screening while the WHO urged neighboring countries to prepare for the possibility of infections. No cases of the virus materialized in those countries.

As cases climbed, Uganda's Health Ministry said it was facing a \$13 million shortfall that was undermining its response efforts. Authorities imposed a strict lockdown in the two most-affected districts.

The U.S. government says it spent \$34 million mainly through international agencies and nongovernmental organizations to support the response. More investments in both the public and animal health sectors and diagnostic laboratories are needed to help Uganda avoid and contain future outbreaks, Natalie E. Brown, the U.S. ambassador to Uganda, said Tuesday.

New tools that have transformed the fight against Ebola in recent years—including antiviral treatments and vaccines used to inoculate patients' contacts to contain the spread—don't work against the Sudan strain of the virus.

The most advanced vaccine candidates that could be effective against the Sudan strain—including one being developed by the Washington-based Sabin Vaccine Institute, another from the University of Oxford's Jenner Institute and a third from the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative—arrived in Uganda in December for trial. The trial had been designed to include contacts of the recently confirmed cases of Ebola, but since there have been no new cases over the past six weeks, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of vaccine candidates, the WHO said.

"WHO and partners will now look at other aspects to advance the evaluation of the candidate vaccines, such as implementing research activities on the doses now available in Uganda," Dr. Otim said.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Shanghai gripped by massive Covid wave
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/10/world/asia/china-covid-shanghai-photos.html
GIST	<p>Shanghai is being gripped by China's massive Covid wave, leading to a surge in hospitalizations and crowded funeral homes.</p> <p>Local health officials said last week that up to 70 percent of the city's 26 million residents had been infected, and they expressed confidence that its outbreak had peaked.</p> <p>But many of the city's hospitals are still overcrowded, particularly with older people. Funeral homes have been inundated with mourners.</p> <p>Infections soared across China late last year, and the government abruptly lifted its strict, but ultimately futile, Covid restrictions in early December. Shanghai endured one of China's most grueling lockdowns last spring, with residents confined to their homes for more than two months.</p> <p>China's current wave of infections has been fueled by a lack of immunity in the population, most of which was not exposed to the coronavirus for years because of the country's strict controls. In addition, many older adults never received a full course of vaccines or booster shots.</p> <p>Hospital personnel say they are overworked because many colleagues are absent, having tested positive for Covid.</p>

	With hospitals overwhelmed, patients are being treated in every available space.
	Many older Chinese adults did not take a full vaccine course or get booster shots, fearing that they were too frail to be inoculated.
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HEADLINE	01/11 Homeless face California storms outside
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/us/california-storms-homeless.html
GIST	<p>SACRAMENTO — The wind on the American River was blowing the rain nearly sideways. Just two nights before, a nearby tree toppled onto a woman, killing her as she slept. Through the flap of a makeshift tent, Jose Reyes, 50, peered into the whipping downpour as cold water pelted his leaky tarp and sluiced down the rusty bed frame he was using as ballast. His sleeping bag was soaked. So were his socks and pant legs.</p> <p>Behind him, a young woman nibbled wet Pringles, her bare feet slender and pale against the mud beneath them. Mr. Reyes — part of a homeless encampment that has occupied this stretch of parkway for years in Sacramento — said it had been days since they rested.</p> <p>“I’ve just been paying attention to the wind,” he said early Monday. “Wondering which tree will crack next.”</p> <p>From rural Sonoma County to the celebrity enclave of Montecito, a brutal parade of atmospheric rivers has tested California’s infrastructure and endurance. Streets have flooded, levees have failed, mudslides have closed highways and wind gusts have knocked out electricity for days. Evacuations have been ordered throughout the state. At least 17 people have died since late December.</p> <p>But few have faced as stark a challenge as the more than 170,000 people who are homeless in California. The state not only has the nation’s largest population of homeless residents, but unlike in colder locales, nearly 70 percent of them sleep in tents, vehicles or public open spaces. Outreach workers in recent days have found them huddling in underpasses and riverbeds, in parks and on beaches.</p> <p>In Ventura County, firefighters rescued at least 14 people in heavy rain on Monday when record flooding in the Ventura River engulfed a homeless encampment. In Sacramento County, officials said, at least two people — Steven Sorensen, 61, and Rebekah Rohde, 40, a member of the American River encampment — were killed outdoors in separate incidents over the weekend when huge, storm-weakened trees fell onto their tents.</p> <p>The extreme weather driven by climate change has intensified the need for efforts to protect homeless people across the country, where about 230,000 people are living unsheltered, according to an annual estimate coordinated by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. In the Phoenix region, heat-related deaths among unhoused people nearly doubled between 2013 and 2021. In Salt Lake City last month, plunging temperatures claimed the lives of five unsheltered people in a week.</p> <p>Matthew Z. Fowle, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Pennsylvania who has been tracking mortality among unhoused people, said that he had sampled about half of the 50 or so large counties that record the relevant information. He said that he had found a “significant increase” since 2015 in deaths from exposure among homeless people, though he noted that the data can be difficult to parse. Between 2015 and 2020, he said, the mortality rate related to extreme heat or cold more than doubled to about 80 per 100,000 homeless people.</p> <p>In California, advocates for homeless people say that too many residents are forced to live on the streets because of an acute shortage of shelter space and affordable housing, even as the state funnels billions of dollars toward solving the problem. But they also blame a severe lack of mental health programs and temporary housing that would encourage more people to come indoors — and stay there.</p>

Federal court decisions and state laws also constrain the ability of cities to clear encampments or force homeless people indoors barring immediate danger. In California cities that are built around rivers, such dynamics have allowed some encampments to persist for years along the riverbanks, which are usually dry but can flood quickly.

In Sacramento, the American River Parkway has both a popular bike path that traverses the county and a large share of homeless campers. They remain dry at most times of the year in drought-stricken California but encounter peril in hard rains or when melted snow rushes down from the Sierra Nevada foothills, filling reservoirs and prompting dam releases that swell the river.

Park rangers try to warn and evacuate as many homeless campers as they can, though plenty insist on staying. Some homeless people say they feel unsafe in group shelters. Some have pets that they cannot bear to leave and that cannot be accommodated. Some fear exposure to Covid-19. Some do not want to leave their belongings behind, or they resent curfews and strict sobriety requirements.

“A lot of people in our shelter are fresh out of prison,” said Steve Andert, 61, an amputee in Sacramento who had left a facility for the homeless early on Monday. People unaccustomed to inmates are frightened enough to want to stay away, he added.

On Monday, the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services said it had met with more than 400 representatives of community agencies and nonprofits across California to connect homeless people and other vulnerable groups with resources and shelters. Brian Ferguson, an emergency services spokesman, said that the aim was to gain confidence through “trusted messengers.”

Outreach workers in some cities say that the additional effort is sorely needed.

“The city and the county have failed to meet people — to provide emergency shelter that actually meets people’s needs,” said Talya Husbands-Hankin, who runs the homeless advocacy organization Love and Justice in the Streets in Oakland, Calif. On Monday she was handing out hot coffee, sandwiches and tarps at encampments in the city.

“As a result of that, people are left to fend for themselves in extremely unsafe circumstances,” Ms. Husbands-Hankin said. “The storm really exposes the bigger issue, which is that living outside without shelter is just not safe.”

The reluctance to enter a shelter, even in the worst of conditions, compounds the hazards of extreme weather both for homeless individuals and the municipalities that struggle to protect them.

Just outside of an Oakland encampment known as Wood Street, debris and trash bags floated in ankle-deep waters. Residents of the encampment, once among the largest in the Bay Area, have been evicted over the past several months and have moved onto neighboring streets, one of which is now partially flooded. Further evictions had been planned for Monday but were [temporarily halted by a federal judge](#), who cited the severe weather in his ruling.

Officials in Alameda County and the City of Oakland said that outreach teams were visiting encampments across the region, providing people with information about the weather and their shelter options. They said they had increased their emergency shelter bed capacities, and that there were still beds available. The city said that animal services could provide overnight shelter for pets.

Ramona Choyce, 44, said that she did not believe that people should be forced into shelters. “What is shelter?” she rhetorically asked as she waded through the water just outside the Wood Street encampment, sorting recyclables that she planned to sell so that she could buy propane. Ms. Choyce said that she had four dogs and valued the private space of her R.V. “I can’t just give them away,” she added of her pets. “They’re my kids.”

In Los Angeles, where the newly elected mayor declared a state of emergency to address the city's homelessness crisis, advocates worried particularly about Skid Row, a fixture of homeless encampments located downtown. Among the 4,400 homeless people there, less than half identify as sheltered.

"Most of them have years of street life and are pretty adept at surviving on the streets, but this cold and wet weather increases the likelihood of people dying from exposure, and that's something we're all very concerned about," said Mike Arnold, the president and C.E.O. of the Midnight Mission, a long-established shelter in the area.

With [flash flood warnings](#) in Los Angeles County, local organizations were handing out rain gear, ponchos and even tents, which they usually do not distribute for fear that recipients will avoid seeking shelter. But a shortage of temporary beds has left limited options, a problem exacerbated by the coronavirus as well as the winding down of a state initiative that had provided hotel and motel rooms during the pandemic.

The mission, which has about 270 beds and, like most shelters in the area, is close to capacity, has been trying to figure out how to quickly add temporary canopies to its outdoor courtyard to offer refuge, albeit unheated.

"Covid has really complicated all of our organizations' abilities to respond quickly when we have wet, cold weather," Mr. Arnold said. "We used to have space like a gymnasium and our public dining room that we could open up and invite people in and keep them warm. But once Covid gets into a shelter it moves like wildfire."

Across Los Angeles County, which has about 70,000 people who are homeless, authorities have also focused on warning those at encampments along the concrete banks of the Los Angeles River, a 51-mile ribbon of water that can rise quickly.

As California braced for the week, north to south, the race to protect people living outside raised larger questions, including the existential matter of how long the place and its people can endure the current battering.

"Everything is water damaged," said Gary Holmes, 55, as he opened the flap of his tent on the bank of Lake Merritt, just east of downtown Oakland.

Mr. Holmes's rugs, blanket and mattress were all soaked. His tent had been partially torn open by a falling tree branch that had barely missed him. In order to stay dry at night, Mr. Holmes sometimes lies down on a trash bag or burns a roll of toilet paper to keep warm. "It made me think," he said. "It's badder than I thought."

At a nearby shelter run by Omni Commons, a community nonprofit, Cy Brown said that he decided to come inside after sleepless nights spent shivering in his drenched clothes.

"That rain was really, really cold, bone-chilling rain. I couldn't find nowhere to hide," said Mr. Brown, who is in his 60s. He said he was now suffering from pneumonia and frostbite on his toes. "I stayed under a tree, but it just kept pounding me," he said of the rain.

On Monday morning, Mr. Brown was taking refuge along with about a dozen others inside the emergency shelter, a dimly lit ballroom where the shapes of sleeping bodies could be made out, swaddled in blankets on inflatable mattresses.

Silver Zhan, a volunteer at the shelter, said that for many, the deluge had been overwhelming: "We're Californians in drought. We don't know how to respond to rain."

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HEADLINE	01/10 FBI uses CIA, NSA to spy on Americans
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/10/fbi-reveals-it-uses-cia-and-nsa-spy-americans/

GIST

The FBI revealed how the bureau uses the CIA and National Security Agency to probe the private lives of Americans without a warrant in its updated rulebook, which is the first version made public since the Obama administration.

The handbook, rewritten in 2021, confirms a decade-old leak showcasing the bureau's collaboration with the CIA and NSA for FBI probes that may involve surveillance without court orders against people not accused of any crimes. Such probes are known as "assessments" at the FBI.

The revelations will fuel critics who have long accused the FBI of abusing its national security surveillance powers.

The FBI's partnership with U.S. intelligence agencies that are focused on foreign threats is expected to get intense scrutiny from the new Republican-run Congress. The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and House Judiciary Committee are digging into how intelligence agencies target Americans. Plans include a new panel to examine the weaponization of the federal government against U.S. citizens.

New information about the FBI's work with other federal agencies and state and local officials is included in the 906-page rule book authored during the Trump administration and revised under President Biden. The bureau published the updated Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide online after rejecting requests to make it public.

The words CIA and NSA are unredacted in section 20.2 of the 2021 rule book, while the full details of the section remain hidden from public view. A leaked 2011 copy of the FBI's rule book without redactions obtained by The Intercept shows that section 20.2 covers name trace requests, which involve formal FBI requests for other agencies to conduct searches of their records regarding subjects of interest.

Information obtained by CIA and NSA searches of their records may be used in assessments and predicated investigations, according to the leaked 2011 rule book.

The FBI assessments are investigations of people and groups that do not require accusations of wrongdoing and need only an "authorized purpose" and a clear objective, according to the 2021 rule book. The investigations are intended to prevent federal crimes, protect against threats to national security or collect foreign intelligence.

Cato Institute senior fellow Patrick Eddington said the updated rule book shows that the FBI is confident that it will not face consequences for its conduct.

"The bureau is continuing to hide the fact that 1) they can and clearly do use informants to penetrate domestic civil society organizations where those informants may, either on their own or at FBI direction, attempt to influence the organization's actions," Mr. Eddington said in an email. "And 2) [they] employ searches of CIA and NSA data streams on U.S. persons or civil society organizations absent a criminal predicate via assessments."

Mr. Eddington said both practices should be prohibited by law and Congress will have a chance to do that this year.

The NSA declined to comment and referred questions to the FBI, which also refused to comment.

The CIA said it follows the rules and respects Americans' privacy.

"CIA recognizes and takes very seriously our obligation to respect the privacy and civil liberties of U.S. persons in the conduct of our vital national security mission, and conducts our activities in compliance with U.S. law, Executive Order 12333, and our Attorney General guidelines," the CIA said in a statement to The Times.

Assessments have faced bipartisan scrutiny in recent years, and the bureau's internal audits dating to 2013 have shown agents' repeated failures to follow rules for sensitive investigations.

The FBI's use of assessments contributed to worries that agents are investigating Americans because of their ideologies, politics or religious beliefs. The conservative Concerned Women for America, a New York chapter of the League of Women Voters, and the Muslim Justice League in Massachusetts are among the groups swept up in FBI assessments, according to records obtained by Mr. Eddington.

The FBI revealed in 2021 that there was nothing to pursue at Concerned Women for America after conducting an assessment in 2016. In December 2021, the bureau told Sen. Chuck Grassley, Iowa Republican, that it did not need to explain its probe of the group.

The FBI's use of assessments drew additional congressional attention from the House last year. Reps. Nancy Mace, South Carolina Republican, and Jamie Raskin, Maryland Democrat, pressed the Government Accountability Office to conduct a comprehensive review of the bureau's assessments.

The bipartisan duo said the FBI may have wrongly used assessments to conduct investigations without factual predicates of criminal wrongdoing. They wanted to know whether the assessments involved the monitoring of constitutionally protected activity.

The bureau's decision to unveil aspects of its work with the CIA and NSA in its 2021 rule book indicates that it has teamed with those intelligence agencies on assessments for more than 10 years.

The Cato Institute sued the FBI for access to government records and pressed the bureau to reveal its rule book before the FBI published it online this fall. Mr. Eddington said his team plans to file challenges to the information that the FBI is keeping hidden in its updated rule book.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Immigration crisis tops Mexico summit
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/10/joe-bidens-immigration-crisis-headlines-mexico-sum/
GIST	<p>President Biden on Tuesday outlined a wide-ranging list of agreements reached between the U.S., Canada and Mexico aimed at promoting economic competitiveness, advancing clean energy initiatives, and combating the surge of migration and drug trafficking at the U.S. southern border as the three leaders capped this year's North America Leaders' summit.</p> <p>After two days of sometimes contentious talks, the three leaders pledged unity in tackling the growing list of challenges facing the region.</p> <p>"We cannot wall ourselves off from shared problems," Mr. Biden said during a press conference capping the summit. "We are stronger and better when we work together."</p> <p>Despite the wide-ranging agenda, immigration remained front and center as the leaders described their progress Tuesday.</p> <p>Just before the visit, Mr. Biden unveiled his strategy to deal with the flood of migration.</p> <p>His plan calls for a new pathway to the U.S. for up to 30,000 migrants a month from Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti and Nicaragua, while increasing enforcement mechanisms to deter those who seek to enter the country illegally.</p> <p>Mr. Biden kicked off his trip to Mexico with a stop along the U.S. southern border, his first as president despite overseeing two years of an unprecedented migration crisis.</p>

On Tuesday, Mr. Biden blamed Republicans for failing to come to the table sooner to stem the tide of migration.

“This has been the greatest migration in human history around the world, as well as in this hemisphere,” he said. “And when I got elected, the first major piece of legislation I introduced was to reform the immigration process to make it more orderly.”

“The point here is that my Republican friends in Congress should join us in the solutions,” he said.

As part of the policy, Mexico has agreed to take on 30,000 migrants per month who are turned away at the U.S. border.

In addition, the three leaders outlined during the summit that they will build on the Los Angeles Declaration announced in June to streamline access to legal migration pathways and announced coordination initiatives to crack down on arms and drug trafficking throughout North America.

Other commitments reached during the summit are aimed at promoting North American economic competitiveness, advancing clean energy and climate change initiatives.

Among the initiatives is a trilateral forum aimed at coordinating investment in semiconductor manufacturing and supply chains across North America on the heels of Mr. Biden signing the \$280 billion Chips and Science Act, which includes more than \$50 billion to boost domestic chip manufacturing.

Mr. Biden has faced blowback from some of the U.S.’ closest allies in recent months over measures meant to boost U.S. competitiveness including Democrats’ marquee \$740 billion climate- and spending bill, which includes generous tax credits for U.S.-manufactured electric vehicles.

European leaders say the measure threatens to cripple their manufacturing as automakers move operations across the Atlantic to capitalize on the incentives, sucking away jobs and investment money as the bloc braces for economic headwinds.

Canada has expressed similar concerns.

Coordination on the semiconductor front will let the three countries identify “complementary investment opportunities,” according to the White House.

The three leaders also agreed on several climate-related initiatives including a joint commitment to reduce methane emissions from solid waste and wastewater by 15% from 2020 levels by 2030.

The leaders also agreed to develop a plan to expand electric vehicle charging stations along their borders, among other clean energy and climate change initiatives.

Mr. Biden kicked off the two-day summit with a notably tense sit-down with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador who accused the U.S. of turning a blind eye to its neighbors to the south.

“This is the moment for us to determine to do away with this abandonment, this disdain, and this forgetfulness for Latin America and the Caribbean,” the Mexican president said.

He added: “President Biden, you hold the key in your hand to open and to substantially improve the relationship among all the countries of the American continent.”

Mr. Biden noted in his remarks that the U.S., in the last 15 years, spent “tens of billions of dollars in the hemisphere.”

“Unfortunately, our responsibility just doesn’t end in the Western Hemisphere,” he said. “It’s in Central Europe. It’s in Asia. It’s in the Middle East. It’s in Africa. It’s in Southwest Asia.”

	<p>The back-and-forth reflected the strained relationship between the two leaders on full display in June when Mr. Lopez Obrador skipped the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles over Mr. Biden’s decision not to invite leaders from Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.</p> <p>Mr. Biden’s bilateral exchange with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stood in stark contrast to his meeting with his Mexican counterpart.</p> <p>In his brief remarks to the press ahead of the meeting, Mr. Biden showcased his optimism for the future and the strong U.S.-Canadian alliance.</p> <p>Mr. Biden shared similar optimism for the trilateral relationship in his concluding remarks.</p> <p>“We’re true partners, the three of us, working together with mutual respect, and genuine like for one another, to advance a safer and more prosperous future for all of our people,” he said. “The reason why this summit, this trilateral relationship, is so impactful is because we share a common vision of the future, grounded on common values.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Soaring diesel prices add inflation pressure
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/10/diesel-prices-soar-adding-inflationary-pressures/
GIST	<p>The cost of a gallon of diesel fuel is soaring even as regular gas prices fall, putting new pressures on U.S. shipping and consumer prices.</p> <p>The national average for diesel hit \$4.54 this week, up nearly \$1 from a year ago, according to the latest data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA). In California, where diesel averages a nation-high \$5.44 a gallon, prices are up about 70 cents.</p> <p>By comparison, the EIA found regular gasoline hit \$3.25 a gallon on Monday, down more than 3 cents from last year.</p> <p>“Higher fuel prices absolutely mean higher costs for transportation, which increases the costs of consumer goods,” said Louis Campion, president of the Maryland Motor Truck Association, a trucking industry group.</p> <p>Higher diesel prices mean a “one-two punch” of increased expenses and less business this year for the 91% of companies that operate six or fewer trucks, he added in an email.</p> <p>“Spikes in gasoline and diesel prices ripple through the economy, impacting consumer budgets and business investments, creating a whole host of inflationary pressures that have serious impacts on the freight economy,” Mr. Campion said. “If people have to spend more on gas, they may begin spending less on other goods and services that will disrupt normal, seasonal freight patterns.”</p> <p>Commercial trucks in the U.S. consume roughly 36 billion gallons of diesel fuel annually as they deliver everything from online shopping orders to frozen poultry for neighborhood markets.</p> <p>Diesel prices have skyrocketed during the pandemic due partly to increased demand for winter shipping and farm equipment fuel, analysts say. At the same time, inventories are running short and U.S. refining capacity is down about 2 million barrels a day from pre-pandemic levels.</p> <p>While President Biden tapped the strategic energy reserve to tamp down skyrocketing gas prices last year, the White House has not taken similar action to lower diesel costs.</p> <p>“This large difference in diesel and gasoline prices is very unusual, especially for such a long period,” said Lucian Pugliaresi, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Energy Policy Research Foundation Inc.</p>

Boycotts of Russian energy stemming from the invasion of Ukraine have led to a global substitution of diesel for natural gas in much of Europe and Asia, he added in an email.

And because of the war, Europe has received many diesel imports that would have otherwise gone to the U.S.

These conditions limit the ability of U.S. officials to manipulate diesel prices, as the White House did with gasoline last year.

“Being the fuel of work, diesel is more influenced by global demands for shipping, construction, etc. Gasoline markets are traditionally more locally determined,” said Allen Schaeffer, executive director of the nonprofit Diesel Technology Forum in Frederick, Maryland.

According to the EIA, supplies of liquid fuels distilled from oil refining are at their lowest since the federal agency started tracking them in 1951.

The EIA estimates inventories of distillate fuel oil have been below a five-year low (2017–21) since the start of last year — and more than 20% below a five-year average.

Diesel advocates blame the shortfalls on increased refinery maintenance, the COVID pandemic, labor shortages, slowed production and “green” pressure to convert the shipping industry to renewable energy.

“Production has been slowing due to refineries either closing or being reworked into biodiesel production as part of a politically based renewable energy agenda,” said Joe Trotter of the American Legislative Exchange Council, a network of conservative private investors and state legislators. “This hurts consumers because refineries can only turn out about half as much biodiesel compared to traditional refining.”

High diesel taxes that penalize companies for relying on fossil fuels present another obstacle to equalizing gas and diesel prices, he added in an email.

The federal tax rate is 24.3 cents a gallon for diesel, compared to 18.3 cents for regular gasoline. At the state level, the average diesel tax is 7.55 cents higher than the average gas tax.

“Ultimately, this push affects the price of every product that requires shipping, especially agriculture products which are produced using machines that run on diesel,” Mr. Trotter said.

Some cyclical factors suggest diesel prices will cool on their own as recessionary pressures grow over the next few months.

Industry insiders point out that seasonal refinery maintenance has largely concluded, the harvest season is over and rising inflation and tightened credit access have slowed freight demand.

And diesel engines of all kinds already use renewable biodiesel fuels. About 132,000 barrels a day of biodiesel and renewable diesel fuel poured into the U.S. market in 2021, according to the Diesel Technology Forum.

“The slowing U.S. economy will drive down demand for diesel, lowering prices and easing overhyped supply concerns,” said Mr. Schaeffer, the forum’s executive director.

Some businesses are also acting to lower diesel costs at the pump.

On Tuesday, convenience store chain Sheetz announced it would lower diesel fuel prices by 50 cents a gallon at its locations nationwide for the rest of this month.

	<p>Company officials said the cut would save roughly “\$10 for mid-size trucks, \$12 for full-size trucks and \$60 for semi-trailers” to top off an average fuel tank.</p> <p>The surge in Americans shopping online during the pandemic has also kept demand high — and it shows no signs of slowing.</p> <p>Diesel prices will keep rising “over several years” unless the Biden administration reverses some green energy policies, said Myron Ebell, an energy expert at the libertarian Competitive Enterprise Institute.</p> <p>“The cost of every item in a store or delivered directly to your door goes up when delivery costs go up,” Mr. Ebell said in an email. “I think it’s fair to say a substantial part of the inflation we’ve seen is due to higher freight costs, and that’s mostly caused by higher diesel prices.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Ukraine Patriot team to train in US
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/10/ukraine-patriot-team-train-us-fighting-drags-russi/
GIST	<p>About 100 Ukrainian soldiers are heading to an Army post in southwest Oklahoma. But the troops are going to Fort Sill to learn how to operate and maintain a Patriot missile battery, part of the most advanced ground-to-air defense system in the U.S. arsenal.</p> <p>The training is set to begin as soon as next week, Defense Department officials told reporters on Tuesday, as the U.S. and its allies escalate the number and sophistication of the weapons being shipped to Kyiv as it battles a Russian invasion force.</p> <p>“The Patriot will contribute to Ukraine’s air defense and provide another capability to the Ukrainian people to defend themselves against Russia’s ongoing aerial assaults,” Air Force Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder, a Pentagon spokesman said.</p> <p>U.S. soldiers as well as those from allied countries already train to operate the Patriot missile system at Fort Sill.</p> <p>The Biden administration confirmed last month that it would be sending the sophisticated Patriot missile battery to Ukraine. The system also includes several maintenance and support vehicles as well as the missile launcher.</p> <p>“This is part of a broader effort by the United States and the international community to provide Ukraine with the air defense capabilities that it needs to defend its population and its armed forces,” Brig. Gen. Ryder said.</p> <p>The U.S. has committed more than \$24 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since Russia invaded on Feb. 24, 2022. Most recently, the Pentagon announced that 50 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles and 500 TOW anti-tank missiles would be drawn from U.S. stocks and sent to Ukraine.</p> <p>Even as the Ukrainian air defense soldiers head to the U.S. for training, heavy fighting is continuing in the disputed Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In his most recent address to the nation, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Monday said the Russians have concentrated their greatest efforts in the city of Soledar.</p> <p>Security analysts say officials with the Wagner Group, a shadowy mercenary army with links to the Kremlin, are using reports of heavy fighting in Soledar to bolster its reputation as an effective fighting force. They claim to have captured territory there over the past few days and predicting they may soon encircle the heavily contested city of Bakhmut.</p> <p>The fallout for the Kremlin from President Vladimir Putin’s decision to invade nearly a year ago continued Tuesday, as NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the way was clearing for Finland and Sweden</p>

	<p>will join the military alliance, just days after the government in Stockholm said it had done all it could to satisfy Turkey's reservations about the alliance's expansion. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock made a surprise visit to the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, raising hopes Berlin could soon step up its arms flow to Kyiv.</p> <p>Separately, Armenia announced it would not host a joint military exercise by a Russian-led security alliance later this year over Russia's reluctance to defend it in the recent conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan.</p> <p>Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has repeatedly criticized Russian peacekeepers for failure to secure free transit along a corridor linking Armenia and the separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh that Azerbaijani activists have blocked since last month, The Associated Press reported.</p> <p>Mr. Pashinyan told reporters in Yerevan on Tuesday that the military exercise the Moscow-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization planned for later this year "inappropriate in the current situation."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Pentagon drops Covid vaccine mandate
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/10/pentagon-drops-covid-19-vaccine-mandate-for-troops/
GIST	<p>The Pentagon dropped its COVID-19 vaccination mandate on Tuesday, a policy that resulted in thousands of service members being forced out of the military over their refusal to get the shot.</p> <p>The order from Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is a result of the fiscal 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, signed by President Biden, that ordered the Defense Department to end the controversial mandate Mr. Austin signed in August 2021 at the height of the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>"No individuals currently serving in the Armed Forces shall be separated solely on the basis of their refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccination if they sought an accommodation on religious, administrative or medical grounds," Mr. Austin wrote in Tuesday's memorandum for senior Pentagon leadership.</p> <p>However, commanders will be allowed to consider a service member's immunization status in making deployments, assignments and other operational decisions — including when vaccination is required to travel to a foreign country, the Defense Department said.</p> <p>Under the mandate, troops were forced out of the military for failing to obey a lawful order. Former personnel will be allowed to petition the Defense Department to request a correction to their personnel records, including the characterization of their discharge.</p> <p>Military officials will cease any ongoing reviews of personnel who are seeking an exemption to the COVID-19 policy on religious or medical grounds, the memo states.</p> <p>In his memo, Mr. Austin defended the COVID-19 vaccination policy, saying it "improved the health of our service members and the readiness of the force."</p> <p>"The Department's COVID-19 vaccination efforts will leave a lasting legacy in the many lives we saved, the world-class force we have been able to field, and the high level of readiness we have maintained, amidst difficult public health conditions," Mr. Austin wrote.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 World Bank: global risk of recession 'close'
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/10/world-bank-warning-global-economy-is-at-risk-of-re/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — The global economy will come "perilously close" to a recession this year, led by weaker growth in all the world's top economies — the United States, Europe and China — the World Bank warned Tuesday.</p>

In an annual report, the World Bank, which lends money to poorer countries for development projects, said it had slashed its forecast for global growth this year by nearly half, to just 1.7%, from its previous projection of 3%. If that forecast proves accurate, it would be the third-weakest annual expansion in three decades, behind only the deep recessions that resulted from the 2008 global financial crisis and the pandemic in 2020.

Though the United States might avoid a recession this year - the World Bank predicts the U.S. economy will eke out growth of 0.5% — global weakness will likely pose another headwind for America's businesses and consumers, on top of high prices and more expensive borrowing rates. The United States also remains vulnerable to further supply chain disruptions if COVID keeps surging or the war in Ukraine worsens.

And Europe, long a major exporter to China, will likely suffer from a weaker Chinese economy.

The World Bank report also noted that rising interest rates in developed economies like the United States and Europe will attract investment capital from poorer countries, thereby depriving them of crucial domestic investment. At the same time, the report said, those high interest rates will slow growth in developed countries at a time when Russia's invasion of Ukraine has kept world food prices high.

The impact of a global downturn would fall particularly hard on poorer countries in such areas as Saharan Africa, where the World Bank predicts per capita income will grow just 1.2% in 2023 and 2024. That is such a tepid pace that poverty rates could rise.

"Weakness in growth and business investment will compound the already devastating reversals in education, health, poverty, and infrastructure and the increasing demands from climate change," said David Malpass, president of the World Bank.

The report follows a similarly gloomy forecast a week earlier from Kristina Georgieva, the head of the International Monetary Fund, the global lending agency. Georgieva estimated on CBS' "Face the Nation" that one-third of the world will fall into recession this year.

"For most of the world economy, this is going to be a tough year, tougher than the year we leave behind," Georgieva said. "Why? Because the three big economies — U.S., E.U., China — are all slowing down simultaneously."

The World Bank projects that the European Union's economy won't grow at all next year after having expanded 3.3% in 2022. It foresees China growing 4.3%, nearly a percentage point lower than it had previously forecast, and about half the pace that Beijing posted in 2021.

The bank expects developing countries to fare better, growing 3.4% this year, the same as in 2022, though still only about half the pace of 2021. It forecasts Brazil's growth slowing to 0.8% in 2023, down from 3% last year. In Pakistan, it expects the economy to expand just 2% this year, one-third of last year's pace.

Other economists have also issued bleak outlooks, though most of them not quite as dire. Economists at JPMorgan are predicting slow growth this year for advanced economies and the world as a whole, but they don't expect a global recession. Last month, the bank predicted that slowing inflation will bolster consumers' ability to spend and power growth in the United States and elsewhere.

"The global expansion will turn into 2023 bent but not broken," the JPMorgan report said.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Seattle CPC comes under public criticism
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/cpc-hears-from-critics-during-presentation-on-seattle-police-recruitment-program-use-of-force-deadly-shooting-citizens-accountability#

GIST

SEATTLE, Wash. — Public feedback turned contentious Tuesday night as Seattle police outlined a new program that connects recruits with the community.

Some critics said the meeting, which was hosted by the Seattle Community Police Commission (CPC), should be about accountability. They said it focused on promoting the police department instead. The complaint was just one of the divisions that surfaced during the virtual meeting as Seattle police work to build relationships with the people they serve.

The first part of the CPC meeting profiled a new effort called "Before the Badge", which is meant to teach recruits how to be better partners with the community.

Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz is one of the main creators of the program. It is in part a response to the Consent Decree that has kept the department under federal oversight for more than a decade, as well as the departure of hundreds of officers that began during the racial justice protests in 2020.

"I wish I would've had training like we're giving now because I would have been a better cop," said Sgt. Ron Campbell who presented the overview of Behind the Badge during the CPC meeting.

Before the Badge is one effort to rebuild department staffing with recruits who're trained to better empathize and relate with the diverse communities and cultures they will encounter while on patrol.

However, when it came time for public comments, some participants chastised the Community Police Commission. They said in its role as a public watchdog, the CPC should focus on rooting out police violence and misconduct.

Castill Hightower said commissioners should be addressing issues like the deadly police shooting of her brother, Herbert Hightower, almost two decades ago.

"I am beyond frustrated, disgusted, and wholly distrustful of the actions of the controlling and operating body of the CPC," Hightower said.

Howard Gale, another participant, said the CPC should spend its time on accountability issues and areas where Seattle police fall short.

KOMO News spoke to other community members who did not attend Tuesday's meeting, and some called for more police patrols, saying public safety is currently compromised.

"I feel like Seattle crime has increased in the past couple of months, and I don't know if that's because of the inefficiencies of the police or because they're not getting enough support," said Manisha Kumari, who lives in Beacon Hill.

Vincent Duong moved to Capitol Hill five months ago and said there are times when it feels unsafe.

"I'd like to see some more police presence. I think it would make a lot of us here safer, but I know there's a lot of people who don't agree on policing."

Meeting organizers agree on the problems of the past need to be addressed but insist programs like Before the Badge can help Seattle police get back on track.

"We can't un-ring the bell of anything in the past but we can figure out a way forward," said Rev. Harriett Walden, one of the CPC commissioners.

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HEADLINE 01/10 Boeing airliner orders hit 4yr-high

SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/business/boeing-737-max-787-passenger-airplane-orders-december-united-airlines-bank-of-china-aviation-southwest-travel-business#
GIST	<p>Boeing took more than 200 net orders for passenger airplanes in December to complete its best year since 2018, but it failed again to catch up with European manufacturer Airbus in orders and aircraft deliveries.</p> <p>Airbus reported Tuesday that it took orders for 820 planes in all of 2022, after subtracting cancellations, and it delivered 661 to airlines and other customers. Those numbers topped Boeing's 774 orders and 480 deliveries.</p> <p>The battle for supremacy in aircraft manufacturing has been a one-sided affair in recent years, as Boeing was dragged down by two deadly crashes of its best-selling plane, the 737 MAX, and with production flaws that halted shipments of a larger plane, the 787. The latest numbers showed Boeing closing the gap, however.</p> <p>Both companies are struggling with shortages of engines and other supply chain issues that limit how fast they can build and deliver planes. The outcome is frustrating to the manufacturers — deliveries were below Airbus expectations — and to airlines that are eager to expand their fleets as travel recovers from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>“The supply environment was constrained in 2022 and will remain constrained in 2023,” Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury said on a call with reporters.</p> <p>Faury said that despite the supply issues, Airbus is committed to increase production rates.</p> <p>Airbus has put up better numbers than Boeing each of the last four years. The Toulouse, France-based company continues to dominate the market for single-aisle or narrowbody airplanes, where the Airbus A320 family has outsold Boeing 737s, and Airbus has added a promising line for the smaller A220, which was originally developed by Canada's Bombardier.</p> <p>Airbus and Boeing, which is based in Arlington, Virginia, and has manufacturing plants in Washington state and South Carolina, are more competitive, however in building twin-aisle or widebody planes for both passengers and cargo.</p> <p>Boeing's 2022 results got a late boost from United Airlines, which placed large orders in December for both the 737 MAX and the larger 787, which is used mostly on international routes. Bank of China Aviation also placed a significant order for 40 MAX jets, Boeing said.</p> <p>Boeing's 2022 total of 774 net orders, after subtracting cancellations, was an increase from 479 in 2021 and a rebound from 2020, when the company lost 471 more orders than it gained.</p> <p>Boeing said it delivered 69 planes in December, including 53 MAX jets. Of those, Southwest took 18, which was a one-month record for any airline customer, Boeing said. Deliveries are an important source of cash because buyers typically pay a large portion of the purchase price upon delivery.</p> <p>Stan Deal, the head of Boeing's commercial-airplanes division, said the company worked hard last year to stabilize 737 production and resume 787 deliveries.</p> <p>“As the airline industry expands its recovery, we are seeing strong demand across our product family,” he said in a statement.</p> <p>Shares of Airbus fell 2% in Paris, while Boeing was down about 1% in afternoon trading in New York.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Peru chaos, violence: death toll rises
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/10/world/americas/peru-protests-deaths.html

LIMA, Peru — A young medical student in his work uniform, desperate, his family said, to help injured protesters. A 22-year old man who had finally saved up enough to study mechanics. An ice cream vendor returning home after a long day of work.

None took part in the demonstrations that have consumed Peru for a month. But all were killed in southern Peru on Monday, casualties in what became the deadliest day of clashes between protesters and government forces since the country erupted in violence last month.

In a matter of hours, at least 17 civilians and one police officer were killed in the chaos of demonstrations, [according to the country's ombudsman office](#), an extraordinary spasm of violence that complicated the new president's attempt to stabilize the country.

The killings, in the city of Juliaca, near the border with Bolivia, drew widespread condemnation of Peruvian security forces, which appear to be responsible for most of the deaths, and have been accused by protesters and human rights groups of using lethal force indiscriminately against civilians.

"He was in uniform, like all the doctors, so that they would be recognized and not attacked," said Milagros Samillan, 27, the sister of the dead medical resident, an aspiring neurosurgeon named Marco Samillan, 31. "But the police still attacked them to kill."

On Tuesday, Jennie Dador, executive secretary of the National Human Rights Coordinator of Peru, an accountability group, blamed "indiscriminate use of force" by state security forces for Monday's deaths. "What happened yesterday was really a massacre," she said. "These were extrajudicial killings."

Peru, the fifth-most-populous nation in Latin America, has been the scene of [violent demonstrations](#) since early December, when the country's leftist president, Pedro Castillo, who had promised to address longstanding issues of poverty and inequality, [attempted to dissolve Congress](#) and rule by decree. The move was widely condemned as unconstitutional and Mr. Castillo was arrested and replaced by his vice president.

Supporters of Mr. Castillo, many of them living in impoverished rural regions, quickly took to the streets to demand new general elections, with many claiming they had been stripped of the right to be governed by the man they had [voted into office](#) just one year earlier.

The violence in Juliaca on Monday marked the deadliest single clash between civilians and armed actors in Peru in at least two decades, when the country emerged from a dictatorship as well as from a long and brutal fight with a violent guerrilla group, a conflict that left at least 70,000 people dead, many of them civilians.

The political convulsion in Peru come as South America faces significant threats to many of its young democracies, with polls showing exceptionally low levels of trust in government institutions, politicians and the media.

On Sunday, supporters of Brazil's former far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, [stormed Congress](#) and other buildings in the capital, fueled by a belief that the election Mr. Bolsonaro lost in October had been rigged. And in nearby Bolivia, protests have erupted in the economic hub of Santa Cruz following the arrest of the opposition governor, whose supporters claim he is being persecuted by the ruling government.

Peru's interior minister, Victor Rojas, said that the protests in Juliaca had begun peacefully on Monday but turned violent around 3 p.m., when about 9,000 protesters tried to take control of the local airport and people armed with makeshift guns and explosives attacked police officers.

Amid the unrest, local television images showed people vandalizing the offices of public prosecutors and a supermarket in Juliaca and [setting fire](#) to the house of a lawmaker from an opposition party.

Mr. Rojas claimed that security forces had acted within legal limits to defend themselves. “It became impossible to control the mob,” he said.

The clashes in Juliaca raise the death toll since Mr. Castillo’s ouster to at least 47 people, [according to](#) the nation’s ombudsman. Nearly all of the dead have been civilians, the office said, with 39 killed, along with one police officer, amid protests and seven killed in traffic accidents related to the unrest or as a result of protesters’ blockades.

The country’s demonstrations began shortly after authorities arrested Mr. Castillo on charges of rebellion on Dec. 7. Over the last month, some protests have been peaceful; in other cases marchers have used slingshots to fling rocks, set up roadblocks on vital highways, burned government buildings and taken over airports.

When the new president, Dina Boluarte, a former ally of Mr. Castillo’s, declared a state of emergency in December, the military took to the streets to maintain order.

Hundreds of police officers and civilians have been injured.

The most recent bloodshed occurred in the region of Puno, a heavily Indigenous part of Peru, after villagers from remote Aymara communities arrived by the thousands in the city of Juliaca.

Many were calling for Mr. Castillo to be returned to office, a political nonstarter in the capital of Lima, and a move that would be illegal.

The chief demand is new general elections, which the electoral authorities said could happen as early as late this year. Congress has rejected such a tight time frame, with many representatives reluctant to give up their seats, but has backed a proposal for a vote in April 2024.

By Tuesday afternoon, Ms. Boluarte still had not commented on the unrest since confirming the first civilian killed a day earlier, when she sounded exasperated with protesters’ demands.

“The only thing in my hands is bringing forward elections — and we’ve already proposed it,” Ms. Boluarte said at an event on Monday. “During peace, anything can be achieved, but amid violence and chaos it gets harder.”

Prime Minister Alberto Otárola, at a news conference, blamed Mr. Castillo and his allies for the deaths of the protesters, saying that they had incited violent attacks meant to destabilize Ms. Boluarte’s government.

“They are who is responsible,” he said, “not our police, and not citizens who have been terrorized to see how these hordes of criminals try to undermine our rights.”

On Tuesday, Mr. Otárola said the region of Puno would be subject to three days of curfew beginning at 8 p.m.

In the wake of the violence, the United Nations, the British ambassador in Peru and other international players issued statements explicitly calling on Peruvian security forces to respect human rights.

The United States, which has repeatedly expressed support for Ms. Boluarte’s government and last week announced \$8 million in new funding for Peru to support efforts to fight drug trafficking, was less direct.

“It is urgent that measures are taken to stop this painful situation of violence and avoid the loss of more human lives,” the U.S. ambassador to Peru, Lisa Kenna, wrote on Twitter.

After the first nine bodies arrived at a hospital in Juliaca on Monday afternoon, Dr. Enrique Sotomayor, a hospital official, told local media that all had been shot with projectiles from firearms strong enough to seriously damage internal organs.

Mr. Samillan, the aspiring neurosurgeon, hoped to one day open a hospital that would serve people with few economic resources, his sister said. He was completing an internship at a hospital in Juliaca, and on Monday, he and other volunteers had gone to the streets to help wounded protesters, she said.

Speaking on the phone as she stood in a courtyard outside the hospital morgue, Ms. Samillan said her brother had been shot twice.

“Everything was so fast, so bloody that even now I can’t believe everything that’s happening,” she said.

Ms. Samillan said her brother was “a person who likes to help people. And many times he has said: ‘I am going to support the people. It doesn’t matter if I lose my life.’ Unfortunately that became real, didn’t it?”

She called for the resignation of Ms. Boluarte.

“The people don’t want her,” she said.

Roger Cayo, 22, always wanted to study mechanics, but he couldn’t afford it, said his only brother, Mauro Cayo. This year he had finally saved up enough money to go. Those plans were dashed when he was shot in the head on Monday while passing by the protests.

“Right now we are all mourners here,” said Mr. Cayo, who was waiting to collect his brother’s body. On the phone, the sound of crying was audible in the background.

Gabriel Omar López, 35, was the first person reported dead by the police on Monday. His wife told a newspaper, La República, that he had been shot amid the chaos after a day selling ice cream in the streets.

On Tuesday, the police identified the dead officer as José Luis Soncco, and the Interior Ministry said he had died after protesters attacked a police vehicle, seized weapons and set the vehicle on fire.

Protesters have vowed to march to Lima in the coming days, while the government has promised to introduce new measures to restore order. Many Peruvians fear a fresh wave of violence.

The government said a delegation of high-ranking officials was being deployed to Puno to establish dialogue. But it was unclear whom they would speak with. On Monday, the interior minister, Mr. Rojas, said he was unable to find anyone in Puno willing to talk with him.

“In the executive branch, we want to do things right, we want to fix our mistakes,” but the protesters have “closed the door” to dialogue, he said.

“Their purpose is to create chaos,” Mr. Rojas said. “They were seeking these deaths.”

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HEADLINE	01/10 Brazil arrests: first rioters, now supporters
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/10/world/americas/brazil-bolsonaro-riot.html
GIST	BRASÍLIA — Brazilian authorities on Tuesday issued arrest warrants for two government security officials, zeroed in on people suspected of funding this week’s violent protests and asked a federal court to freeze the assets of the far-right former president, Jair Bolsonaro, a broad expansion of the investigation into the invasion of Brazil’s Congress, Supreme Court and presidential offices by protesters on Sunday.

The moves showed that, a day after arresting hundreds of people suspected of taking part in Sunday's riot in Brazil's capital, Brasília, the nation's top officials have now turned their focus to the political and business elites suspected of inspiring, organizing or aiding the rioters.

Alexandre de Moraes, a Brazilian Supreme Court justice, issued the warrants for the two security officials, including Anderson Torres, the man effectively in charge of security for the capital, in response to a request by the federal police.

Mr. Moraes, a controversial figure who has been accused of [severely overstepping his authority](#), said that investigators had evidence that the officials knew violence was brewing but did nothing to stop it. He said that they were under investigation for terrorism, criminal association and offenses related to the violent overthrow of democracy.

Separately on Tuesday, a top public prosecutor asked a federal court to freeze the assets of Mr. Bolsonaro in relation to the investigation into the riots, though his office declined to explain why.

The protesters invaded the government buildings [under the false belief](#) that October's presidential election, which Mr. Bolsonaro lost, was rigged, their actions spurred in part because of his [yearslong efforts to undermine the electorate's faith](#) in Brazil's election systems.

The request to freeze Mr. Bolsonaro's assets is now in the hands of a judge, but it is unclear whether the court has the legal power to block his accounts. And freezing assets, even if it were not challenged in court, could prove a lengthy and complex process.

Authorities are also expected to take action against more than 100 companies thought to have helped the protesters, including many believed to have transported rioters to the capital or to have provided them with free food and shelter, according to Brazilian media reports.

Brazil's new justice minister, Flávio Dino, said government investigators had zeroed in on companies in at least 10 states that were suspected of having helped finance the riots. Authorities were seeking arrest warrants for "people who did not come to Brasília, but who participated in the crime, who are organizers, financiers," Mr. Dino said on Tuesday.

Both Mr. Dino and President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva have said that they believe prominent players in the country's powerful agriculture industry, which largely backed Mr. Bolsonaro in the election, played a role.

"These people were there today, the agribusiness," Mr. Lula said after the attacks, adding that "all these people will be investigated, found out, and will be punished."

The moves highlighted the growing scope of the hunt to identify the ideological, logistical and financial architects of Sunday's chaos, the worst attack on Brazil's institutions since a military dictatorship ended in 1985.

Many people who participated in the riots had been camped out for weeks outside the Army headquarters in Brasília, espousing the false claim that October's election was stolen and calling for the military to step in. Military and independent experts [found no credible evidence of voter fraud](#) in the election, in which Mr. Lula, a leftist former president, defeated Mr. Bolsonaro. Mr. Lula took office on Jan. 1.

While Mr. Bolsonaro had for years asserted, without evidence, that Brazil's election systems were [plagued by fraud](#), after the election he authorized the transition of power to Mr. Lula. Mr. Bolsonaro, who [has been in the United States](#) since before the inauguration, criticized the rioters on Sunday, saying that peaceful demonstrations were part of democracy but the "destruction and invasions of public buildings" was not.

In the wake of the riot, investigators are grappling with difficult questions about why rioters were able to enter federal government buildings so easily — and whether security authorities were blindsided, negligent or somehow complicit.

Some officials have been quick to place much of the blame on Mr. Torres, who served as Mr. Bolsonaro's justice minister before becoming the security chief of the Federal District, a small province that includes Brasília, on Jan. 2. That position made him largely in charge of the security plans for the protest on Sunday.

Yet upon taking the new job, Mr. Torres quickly dismissed several key officials in his staff and then left for a vacation to Florida, leaving him out of the state during Sunday's protests, according to Ricardo Cappelli, who has temporarily replaced Mr. Torres under an emergency decree signed by Mr. Lula.

In [an interview with the Brazilian newspaper O Globo](#) on Tuesday, Mr. Cappelli said that in the days ahead of the large planned protests on Sunday, Mr. Torres assured the federal government that his team was in control.

"What reached us was information saying that everything was fine, that the demonstration would be peaceful and that the troops would guarantee it," he said.

In comments to reporters on Tuesday, Mr. Cappelli accused Mr. Torres of purposefully "sabotaging" the security around the protests. As soon as Mr. Torres took over on Jan. 2, he said, "Chaos ensues. Coincidence? I don't think so."

Federal officials have also said that, during a planning meeting two days before the protests, Mr. Torres and other officials promised a far more robust security presence during the demonstrations than what they delivered.

State officials have said they accepted responsibility for the failures, but have not explained why security was light, despite warnings of the possibility of violent protests.

Mr. Torres said on Twitter that he would cut his vacation short and return to Brazil to defend himself. "I have always guided my actions with ethics and legality. I believe in the Brazilian justice system and in the strength of the institutions. I am certain that the truth will prevail," [he said](#).

Mr. Torres has long been a close ally of Mr. Bolsonaro. As the former president's justice minister, Mr. Torres was a key player in the attacks against Brazil's electronic voting machines. In July 2021, Mr. Bolsonaro announced that he would lay out his full case on why Brazil's election system was rife with fraud. In a subsequent two-hour livestream, Mr. Torres sat next to him and presented videos claiming to show how voting machines could be hacked, which security experts later debunked.

Responding to requests from the federal police, Mr. Moraes issued warrants for the arrest of Mr. Torres and Fabio Augusto Vieira, the chief of the Federal District's police. Mr. Moraes said the arrests were necessary to protect the investigation, preventing the suspects from destroying evidence or intimidating witnesses.

Brazil's solicitor general also issued a request for Mr. Torres's arrest, while another top federal prosecutor requested to freeze his assets. That prosecutor also asked to freeze the assets of the Federal District's governor, Ibaneis Rocha, who has also been accused of allowing inadequate security during the protests. Hours after the riots concluded, Mr. Moraes suspended Mr. Rocha from his job as governor for at least 90 days.

Mr. Moraes, a Supreme Court justice who is also Brazil's elections chief, has become one of the nation's most powerful officials in recent years after his fellow justices expanded his authority to combat what they call an unusual threat to Brazil's democracy posed by Mr. Bolsonaro and his supporters.

In the run up to last year's election, Mr. Moraes and fellow justices jailed several of Mr. Bolsonaro's supporters without trial for threatening Brazilian officials or institutions, and Mr. Moraes has forced tech companies to suspend the accounts of dozens of prominent right-wing voices.

	<p>Some on Brazil's right have criticized the aggressive response to the riots, saying Mr. Moraes and other officials are overstepping their authority. Hamilton Mourão, a former Army general who was Mr. Bolsonaro's vice president, criticized what he called "indiscriminate detention" of people suspected of taking part in the riots. The crackdown, he wrote on social media, "shows that the new government, consistent with its Marxist-Leninist roots, acts in an amateurish, inhumane and illegal manner."</p> <p>By Tuesday, the police had arrested 727 people in connection with the riots and were still questioning hundreds of others, the federal police said in a statement. Some 599 people who were detained for questioning had been released from custody.</p> <p>Many rioters filmed themselves and others as they invaded the government buildings, giving authorities a body of evidence to build a case. Augusto de Arruda Botelho, Brazil's justice secretary, said the police had also collected DNA samples and fingerprints from the buildings.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 WA traffic deaths outpaced national toll
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/traffic-deaths-in-wa-outpaced-national-toll-in-2022-early-data-shows/
GIST	<p>Nearly 600 people died on Washington's roads in the first nine months of 2022, according to preliminary data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration — a more than 20% jump compared with the same period a year earlier.</p> <p>A full accounting of 2022's toll will come later this year as officials work to confirm their counts.</p> <p>Washington's deadly trend stands in contrast with the national picture, which for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic turned negative, even if by a modest 0.2%.</p> <p>The state had a particularly bad few months in early 2022, said Mark McKechnie, director of external relations for the Washington State Traffic Safety Commission.</p> <p>"At the very beginning of the year, we thought we were on track for 800 fatalities," he said.</p> <p>The harrowing toll cooled slightly as the year progressed and now state officials predict that, by the time the numbers are confirmed for all of 2022, the total will be closer to 700, marking a 5%-10% increase from 2021. Still, McKechnie said, they're "99% certain" that 2022 will be the fourth year in a row with more traffic deaths than the year before — and likely the deadliest in 25 years.</p> <p>Why Washington saw yet another jump while other states saw decreases in their numbers will be a matter of ongoing study as the year's tally is confirmed, but McKechnie expects many of the same culprits apply: speed, wide roads through communities and impairment.</p> <p>Few obvious patterns stand out among the states that saw improvement; no matter if they were small or large; rural or urban; or liberal or conservative. South Dakota saw the largest drop in deaths, down 28% from 2021. Nebraska, meanwhile, another rural state, saw a 23% increase. California's number declined by more than 2% while New York's increased by nearly 4%.</p> <p>The jump in traffic deaths in 2020, despite reduced traffic in the early months of the pandemic, surprised observers. The prevailing explanation became that with emptier roads, drivers sped more, resulting in deadlier collisions.</p> <p>That narrative is complicated, however, by the fact that deaths remain high even as society has reopened, and drivers returned to the roads.</p>

A recent [analysis by AAA](#), first reported on by [StreetsBlog USA](#), further complicates it. The roadside assistance company concluded much of the increase encompassed deaths that occurred at night or very early in the morning, when congestion is unlikely to have played a role. Researchers also found a large jump in the number of people with expired licenses involved in deadly crashes and more cases of hit and run.

Understanding Washington's numbers will likely take months, said McKechnie. Anecdotally, the safety commission continues to receive reports of speeding, which was a factor in 30% of deadly crashes last year. Impairment is also a major driver of fatal collisions — 32% involved alcohol and 37% involved drugs in 2021.

Larger factors include the increase in vehicle weight and the roads that run through increasingly populated communities without amenities for pedestrians or bikes.

Enforcement of speeding is also still far below 2019 numbers as well.

As the 2023 legislative session begins, [lawmakers have pledged to prioritize safety](#) in the House and Senate transportation committees. One proposal would lower the legal blood alcohol limit to 0.05% from 0.08%.

McKechnie said he's hopeful more cities and towns will take advantage of automated speed cameras; changes to state law during last year's session mean they are more widely allowed than in the past. Additionally, last year's nearly \$17 billion transportation funding package included requirements that new projects include safety measures for walkers and bikers.

While overall deaths are down slightly nationwide, pedestrian and cyclist deaths still increased — up 8% among people on bikes and 2% among people walking. In total, 31,785 died in the first nine months of 2022.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Mpox fades: various factors aided decline
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/mpox-has-faded-in-the-us-who-deserves-the-credit/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — Less than six months ago, mpox was an exploding health crisis. What had been an obscure disease from Africa was ripping through European and U.S. gay communities. Precious doses of an unproven vaccine were in short supply. International officials declared health emergencies.</p> <p>Today, reports of new cases are down to a trickle in the U.S. Health officials are shutting down emergency mobilizations. The threat seems to have virtually disappeared from the public consciousness.</p> <p>“We’re in a remarkably different place,” said Dr. William Schaffner, a Vanderbilt University infectious diseases expert. “It’s really impressive how that peak has come down to very, very low levels.”</p> <p>So who deserves the credit? It’s an unsettled question, but experts cite a combination of factors.</p> <p>Some commend public health officials. Others say more of the credit should go to members of the gay and bisexual community who took their own steps to reduce disease spread when the threat became clear. Some wonder if characteristics of the virus itself played a role.</p> <p>“It’s a mixed story” in which some things could have gone better but others went well, said Dr. Tom Frieden, a former director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Cases soar, then fall</p> <p>Mpox, formerly known as monkeypox, is a rare disease caused by infection with a virus that’s in the same family as the one that causes smallpox. It is endemic in parts of Africa, where people have been infected through bites from rodents or small animals, but it was not known to spread easily from person to person.</p>

Mpox cases began emerging in Europe and the U.S. in May, mostly among men who have sex with men. Cases escalated rapidly in dozens of countries in June and July, around the time of gay pride events. The infections were rarely fatal, but many people suffered painful skin lesions for weeks.

In late July, the World Health Organization declared an international health crisis. In early August, the U.S. declared a public health emergency.

Soon after, the outbreak began diminishing. The daily average of newly reported U.S. cases went from nearly 500 in August to about 100 in October. Now, there are fewer than five new U.S. cases per day. (Europe has seen a similar drop.)

Experts said a combination of factors likely turned the tide.

Vaccinations

Health officials caught an early break: An existing two-dose vaccine named Jynneos, developed to fight smallpox, was also approved for use against the monkeypox.

Initially, only a few thousand doses were available in the U.S., and most countries had none at all. Shipping and regulatory delays left local health departments unable to meet demand for shots.

In early August, U.S. health officials decided to stretch the limited supply by giving people just one-fifth the usual dose. The plan called for administering the vaccine with an injection just under the skin, rather than into deeper tissue.

Some in the public health community worried that it was a big decision based on a small amount of research — a single 2015 study. But the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention since then has confirmed there was no difference in vaccine performance between the two methods.

“They got criticized for the revised dosing strategy, but it was the right call,” said Frieden, who is currently president of Resolve to Save Lives, a non-profit organization focused on preventing epidemics.

Cases, however, had already begun falling by the time the government made the switch.

Community outreach

The current CDC director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, cited efforts to educate doctors on how to better diagnose and treat mpox. Other experts said that even more important was outreach to the sexually active gay and bisexual men most at risk.

In the first months of the outbreak, the government was cautious about focusing warnings too intently on gay and bisexual men for fear of stigmatizing the men and — in so doing — undermining efforts to identify infections. (Indeed, in November the WHO changed the name of the disease from monkeypox to mpox in an effort to reduce stigma.)

“They were a little coy about the population principally affected,” Schaffner said.

Many say queer activists and community organizations stepped up to fill the void, quickly offering frank education and assistance. In an online survey conducted in early August, many men who have sex with men reported having fewer sexual encounters and partners because of the outbreak.

“The success was really due to grassroots activities,” said Amira Roess, a George Mason University professor of epidemiology and global health. Leaders in the gay community “took it upon themselves to step in when the government response was really lacking” in a way that recalled what happened during the plodding government response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, she said.

Among those efforts was called RESPND-MI — Rapid Epidemiologic Study of Prevalence, Networks, and Demographics of Monkeypox Infection. The grant-funded organization put out transmission-prevention messaging, conducted a community-led survey of mpox symptoms, and mapped the social and sexual networks of queer and transgender people in New York City.

Nick Diamond, a leader of the effort, said government response improved only after gay activists pressured officials and did a lot of the outreach and education themselves.

“A lot of HIV activists knew that it would be up to us to start a response to monkeypox,” he said.

But Diamond also noted another possible reason for the declines: Spread of mpox at LGBTQ celebrations in June — coupled with a lack of testing and vaccinations — likely contributed to the July surge. “A lot of people came out of Pride, after being in close contact, symptomatic,” he said. They suffered blisters and scabs, bringing home the message to other at-risk men that the virus was a very real danger.

Biology vs. behavior

There are also possible explanations that have more to do with biology than behavior.

The number of new infections may have been limited by increases in infection-acquired immunity in the men active in the social networks that fueled the outbreak, CDC scientists said in a recent report.

Past research has suggested there may be limits in how many times mpox virus will spread from person to person, noted Stephen Morse, a Columbia University virologist.

“The monkeypox virus essentially loses steam after a couple of rounds in humans,” Morse said. “Everyone credits the interventions, but I don’t know what the reason really is.”

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HEADLINE	01/10 Omicron booster kept seniors out hospitals
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/first-real-world-data-shows-omicron-booster-kept-seniors-out-of-hospitals/
GIST	<p>In the first real-world test of vaccine boosters specially designed to protect against the omicron variant, Israeli researchers have found that people 65 and over who got an updated jab were 81% less likely to be hospitalized with COVID-19 than those who did not.</p> <p>The preliminary findings, posted to a website established by the British medical journal Lancet, have not yet been through the peer-review process. They are based on the medical records of more than 85,000 people 65 and over who got a dose of Pfizer and BioNTech’s retooled mRNA booster and more than 537,000 others in the same age group who did not get the shot.</p> <p>During a 70-day period between late September and mid-December, 297 people in the larger, unboosted group were hospitalized and 73 died. During the same period, six people in the boosted group were hospitalized and one died. When the Israeli researchers crunched the numbers, they determined that the boosters reduced a recipient’s risk of hospitalization to about one-fifth that of an unboosted person.</p> <p>Those results suggest that — in the initial weeks after vaccination at least — the omicron-specific vaccines are even more effective than had been documented to date. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had assessed their efficacy in preventing hospitalization at between 31% and 73%.</p> <p>The Israeli findings also suggest that the new boosters may help in fending off COVID-19 deaths as well as hospitalizations. As a statistical matter, however, the small numbers of deaths in the study population make it difficult to draw such a conclusion with high confidence.</p>

The study's authors, who hail from Israel's [Clalit Health Services](#) and several Israeli universities, wrote that their findings "highlight the importance of bivalent-booster vaccination in this high-risk population, and the necessity to increase efforts to encourage eligible people to be vaccinated."

The omicron-specific vaccines are called "bivalent" boosters because they use two prompts to train the immune system to recognize the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. In addition to going after the original strain that was detected in December 2019, they also target the omicron variant, which began circulating in November 2021.

The new formula was devised in response to concerns that waning immunity, and a changing virus, had compromised the protection of people who had been fully vaccinated and once boosted against COVID-19. Even before it was rolled out, however, the omicron variant began spinning myriad subvariants, raising new concerns about how effectively bivalent boosters would continue to protect.

Since COVID-19 vaccines first became available, Israel has been closely studied because it quickly immunized most of its population with Pfizer's mRNA vaccine. In Israel, the bivalent booster shots have been prioritized for people who are at high risk for developing severe cases of COVID-19 if infected, and for those 65 and older.

The United States, however, has taken a different approach. The CDC recommends that all Americans who are at least 6 months old get an omicron-specific shot from either Pfizer or Moderna if they are eligible.

Though the shots are available for free to virtually all in the United States, many Americans have greeted the new offerings with indifference. Only 15.4% of Americans 5 and older have gotten a bivalent booster dose, according to [the latest data](#) from the CDC.

"People are complacent," said Dr. Oliver Brooks, chief medical officer of Watts Healthcare in Los Angeles. It's one thing to counter vaccine hesitancy, he said, and it remains important to ensure easy access for all. But when people become confident they'll be fine without boosters, public health officials have an uphill battle, he added.

"What we do know is, you're better off vaccinated and boosted. Period," Brooks said.

Interest in bivalent boosters has been greater among older adults, whose vulnerability to severe COVID-19 is clearly higher. Some 31.8% of Americans 65 and older have gotten the updated shots, but rates vary widely from state to state. In California, nearly 43% of seniors have rolled up their sleeves, and in Vermont, about 70% of seniors have done so. But in Mississippi, only 19% of senior citizens have received it. Louisiana and Alabama are close to the bottom too, with roughly 21% of seniors getting it.

Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine expert at Children Hospital of Philadelphia, said the Israeli study makes a good case that for those 65 and older, the bivalent booster helps. But he said it does little to make the case that younger people will benefit from the shots.

The fact that the average age of the Israelis studied was just over 75 raises the possibility that the boosters provide the greatest protection to the "elderly elderly," he said.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Philippines void China oil exploration pact
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/philippine-court-voids-oil-exploration-pact-involving-china-96338594
GIST	MANILA, Philippines -- The Philippine Supreme Court on Tuesday declared unconstitutional a 2005 pact by China, the Philippines and Vietnam to jointly explore for oil in the disputed South China Sea, a decision that also brings other proposed agreements into doubt.

The decision by 12 of the court's 15 justices voided the Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking agreement by state-owned companies in the three nations, which are among Asian countries locked in decades-long territorial disputes in the busy waterway.

Two justices dissented and one was on leave and did not vote. The court did not immediately make public the full decision and only released highlights in a statement.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who took office in June last year, expressed willingness to revive failed negotiations for joint oil exploration with China in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, in Beijing last week.

The court ruled that the 2005 agreement violated the constitution by allowing the state-owned oil companies of China and Vietnam to undertake joint oil exploration in Philippine waters. The charter specifies that “the exploration, development and utilization of natural resources shall be under the full control and supervision of the state.”

The petitioners argued that oil exploration in Philippine waters should be undertaken by Filipino citizens or corporations and groups that are at least 60% owned by Filipinos, according to the court.

Proponents argued that the agreement only involved pre-exploration activities which were not covered by the constitutional prohibition.

But the court said the accord’s intent “is to discover petroleum which is tantamount to `exploration.’”

The agreement led to a joint oil search in 142,886 square kilometers (55,168 square miles) of sea, including waters claimed by the Philippines as part of its territory and other areas it contests with China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan.

Under President Rodrigo Duterte, Marcos’s predecessor, the Philippines signed a 2018 agreement with China aimed at agreeing on terms for a possible joint oil and gas exploration in the disputed waters. But years of negotiations failed, mainly due to disagreement over which side has sovereign rights over the stretch of sea to be covered by the joint search.

Duterte’s administration terminated the agreement shortly before his six-year term ended last year.

A 2016 ruling by a United Nations-backed arbitration tribunal invalidated China’s extensive territorial claims based on historical grounds in the South China Sea. Beijing did not participate in the arbitration, rejected the decision and continues to defy it.

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HEADLINE	01/11 China renews attack threat against Taiwan
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-renews-threat-taiwan-island-holds-drills-96355522
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- China renewed its threats Wednesday to attack Taiwan and warned that foreign politicians who interact with the self-governing island are “playing with fire.”</p> <p>A spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office said the country was recommitted in the new year to “safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity” and “smashing plots for Taiwan independence” on the self-governing democracy that separated from mainland China in 1949.</p> <p>“The malicious support for Taiwan independence among anti-China elements in a few foreign countries are a deliberate provocation,” Ma Xiaoguang said at a biweekly news conference.</p> <p>China views Taiwan as a Chinese territory that must be brought under Beijing's control, by force if necessary. A string of visits in recent months by foreign politicians to Taiwan, including by then-U.S.</p>

	<p>House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and numerous politicians from the European Union, spurred displays of military might from both sides.</p> <p>This week, Taiwan’s military is staging drills intended to reassure the public of its ability to counter China’s threats ahead of this month’s Lunar New Year holiday.</p> <p>“The most important thing is to maintain the safety of our airspace and national security,” air force Lt. Col. Wu Bong-yeng told reporters at Hsinchu Air Base just south of the capital, Taipei.</p> <p>The drills coincide with a visit from German and Lithuanian lawmakers — the latter Baltic state being a particular target of Chinese ire for upgrading its ties with Taiwan.</p> <p>“We call on the relevant countries to ... cease sending the wrong signals to Taiwan independence separatist forces and cease playing with fire on the question of Taiwan," Ma said.</p> <p>China has responded to foreign visits by holding large-scale military exercises seen by some as a rehearsal for a blockade or invasion. Beijing sends airplanes and warships toward Taiwan on a near-daily basis, often crossing the midline of the 160 kilometer (100 miles) Taiwan Strait dividing the sides. At the end of December, China sent a record 71 planes and seven ships toward Taiwan — the largest such scale exercise in 2022.</p> <p>China’s efforts to isolate the island diplomatically have left Taiwan with just 14 official diplomatic partners, although it retains robust unofficial relations with key ally the U.S. and more than 100 nations around the world.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Ethiopia Tigray hand over heavy weapons
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ethiopias-tigray-forces-hand-heavy-weapons-96355528
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya -- The spokesman for Tigray forces in Ethiopia says they have handed over heavy weapons as a key part of the agreement signed with Ethiopia’s government late last year to end a two-year conflict.</p> <p>Getachew Reda tweeted early Wednesday that an African Union monitoring team confirmed the handover. He expressed hope it would “go a long way in expediting the full implementation of the agreement.”</p> <p>The Tigray forces especially seek the withdrawal of troops from neighboring Eritrea, which has fought alongside Ethiopian forces but was not a party to the agreement. Witnesses have told The Associated Press that Eritrean fighters remain in some communities.</p> <p>The United States and United Nations, citing the work of academics, have estimated that hundreds of thousands of people died in the conflict in Africa’s second most populous country.</p> <p>Basic services, flights and humanitarian aid have begun to resume to the long cut-off Tigray region of more than 5 million people.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 US seizes Iran weapons bound for Yemen
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-navy-seized-iran-assault-rifles-bound-yemen-96332906
GIST	<p>DUBAI, United Arab Emirates -- The U.S. Navy seized over 2,100 assault rifles from a ship in the Gulf of Oman it believes came from Iran and were bound for Yemen’s Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, a Navy spokesman said Tuesday. It was the latest capture of weapons allegedly heading to the Arab world’s poorest country.</p> <p>The seizure last Friday happened after a team from the USS Chinook, a Cyclone-class coastal patrol boat, boarded a traditional wooden sailing vessel known as a dhow. They discovered the Kalashnikov-style</p>

rifles individually wrapped in green tarps aboard the ship, said Cmdr. Timothy Hawkins, a spokesman for the Navy's Mideast-based 5th Fleet.

Experts examining photos released by the Navy later said the weapons appeared to be Chinese-made T-56 rifles and Russian-made Molot AKS20Us. Type 56 rifles have been found in previously seized weapons caches. Similar green tarping also has been used.

The Chinook, along with the patrol boat USS Monsoon and the guided missile destroyer USS The Sullivans, took possession of the weapons.

"When we intercepted the vessel, it was on a route historically used to traffic illicit cargo to the Houthis in Yemen," Hawkins told The Associated Press. "The Yemeni crew corroborated the origin."

The Yemeni crew, Hawkins added, will be repatriated to a government-controlled part of Yemen.

A United Nations arms embargo has prohibited weapons transfers to the Houthis since 2014, when Yemen's civil war erupted.

Iran has long denied arming the Houthis even as it has been transferring rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, missiles and other weaponry to the Yemeni militia using sea routes. Independent experts, Western nations and U.N. experts have traced components seized aboard other detained vessels back to Iran.

Iran's mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment Tuesday.

The Houthis seized Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in September 2014 and forced the internationally recognized government into exile. A Saudi-led coalition armed with U.S. weaponry and intelligence entered the war on the side of Yemen's exiled government in March 2015. Years of inconclusive fighting has pushed the Arab world's poorest nation to the brink of famine.

A six-month cease-fire in Yemen's war, the longest of the conflict, expired in October despite diplomatic efforts to renew it. That's led to fears the fighting could again escalate. More than 150,000 people have been killed in Yemen during the conflict, including over 14,500 civilians.

There have been sporadic attacks since the cease-fire expired, though international negotiators are trying to find a political solution to the war.

In November, the Navy found 70 tons of a missile fuel component hidden among bags of fertilizer, also allegedly from Iran and bound to Yemen.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Ukraine sees surge of female fighters
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/ukraine-sees-surge-female-fighters/story?id=96331526
GIST	<p>By now she's gained a few nicknames; from "punisher of Russians," to the "Ukrainian Joan of Arc."</p> <p>Eugenia Emerald has become somewhat of an icon in Ukraine, fighting on the front lines as a sniper -- the only woman in her unit.</p> <p>She's one of more than 50,000 women now enlisted in the Ukrainian army.</p> <p>"All Russians are scared of us," said Emerald. "Afraid of me, afraid of us. Ukrainian women."</p> <p>Women on the front is still a relatively recent phenomenon in Ukraine. As of 2014, when Russia invaded Crimea, women were still barred from combat roles. It wasn't until 2018 that female soldiers were finally given the same status as men -- and, according to Ukraine's Defense Ministry, women now account for close to a one-fifth of Ukraine's armed forces.</p>

Emerald's said her father taught her how to use a weapon. She later enrolled in a military program in college, and when war broke out in February, the army called her up to see if she'd be willing to fight. As a single mom, Emerald said she made the difficult decision to leave her 11-year-old daughter behind. She's been everywhere now -- from Kharkiv and Zhytomyr, to Bucha and the battle for Kyiv.

But she says being a woman on the front has its fair share of challenges: battling both the common enemy and internal discrimination. Emerald recounted how one man she came into contact with told her a woman's place was not on the battlefield, but in the kitchen.

"I was angry, really angry," she said, adding she had to work twice as hard to be taken seriously. "But they respect me later."

It's something Anastasia Kolesnyk, who enlisted on the first day of the war, said she has also had to deal with.

"You always have to prove yourself," she said. "When you meet the new division, they need a couple days to get used to you, and the fact that you are the same as them."

Anastasia says she's not surprised so many Ukrainian women have enlisted.

"The only option I had was to enlist," said Anastasia. Because when a murderer and a thief come to your house, you don't just run away-- you try to protect it. And everything was at stake."

The surge of female soldiers is so new that Ukraine's military still doesn't have standard uniforms for women -- meaning they're often handed ill-fitting men's clothes.

"In the beginning, it was very cold -- I had to wear my sneakers, because there were no military boots available in my size," Kolesnyk said. "And the uniforms were two sizes too big," she added.

So she asked her brother Andrii and his girlfriend Kseniia Drahanyuk to send her the items she needed -- and after the two realized just how much gear Kolesnyk was lacking, they created the Zemlyachki nonprofit to help other female soldiers. They've now helped over 3,000 women, sending them over \$1 million worth of care packages that include things like lighter body armor, tampons, smaller shoes, and fitted uniforms, Kolesnyk said.

As Emerald showed us her gear -- and the uniform that was in fact once too big for her -- she also stumbled upon her wedding dress.

Because in the middle of the fighting, Emerald also found love -- another soldier, in another unit, who read an article about her and reached out on Instagram. The two married on the battlefield, near Kharkiv.

Amid all the death and destruction, Emerald is now carrying new life -- she is pregnant with a baby girl.

"You know, my first daughter -- she is like a princess," she said. "But I think my second daughter, yes, she will be like me. And if she wants, I will teach her [how to] shoot."

She says as hard as it would be to leave her two daughters now, she would eventually like to head back to the front.

"Ukrainian women are very strong, and all of us love our land," she said, adding it's precisely because of her daughters -- and their future-- that she risks it all.

"It's the reason I go to war," she said.

HEADLINE	01/10 Dept. Interior passwords cracked in audit
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2023/01/a-fifth-of-passwords-used-by-federal-agency-cracked-in-security-audit/
GIST	<p>More than a fifth of the passwords protecting network accounts at the US Department of the Interior—including Password1234, Password1234!, and ChangeItN0w!—were weak enough to be cracked using standard methods, a recently published security audit of the agency found.</p> <p>The audit was performed by the department’s Inspector General, which obtained cryptographic hashes for 85,944 employee active directory (AD) accounts. Auditors then used a list of more than 1.5 billion words that included:.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dictionaries from multiple languages• US government terminology• Pop culture references• Publicly available password lists harvested from past data breaches across both public and private sectors• Common keyboard patterns (e.g., “qwerty”). <p>The results weren’t encouraging. In all, the auditors cracked 18,174—or 21 percent—of the 85,944 cryptographic hashes they tested; 288 of the affected accounts had elevated privileges, and 362 of them belonged to senior government employees. In the first 90 minutes of testing, auditors cracked the hashes for 16 percent of the department’s user accounts.</p> <p>The audit uncovered another security weakness—the failure to consistently implement multi-factor authentication (MFA). The failure extended to 25—or 89 percent—of 28 high-value assets (HVAs), which, when breached, have the potential to severely impact agency operations.</p> <p>“It is likely that if a well-resourced attacker were to capture Department AD password hashes, the attacker would have achieved a success rate similar to ours in cracking the hashes,” the final inspection report stated. “The significance of our findings regarding the Department’s poor password management is magnified given our high success rate cracking password hashes, the large number of elevated privilege and senior government employee passwords we cracked, and the fact that most of the Department’s HVAs did not employ MFA.”</p> <p>The most commonly used passwords, followed by the number of users, were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Password-1234 478• Br0nc0\$2012 389• Password123\$ 318• Password1234 274• Summ3rSun2020! 191• Orlando_0000 160• Password1234! 150• ChangeIt123 140• 1234password\$ 138• ChangeItN0w! 130 <p>TechCrunch reported the results of the audit earlier. The publication said auditors spent less than \$15,000 building a password-cracking rig. Quoting a department representative, it continued:</p> <p>The setup we use consists of two rigs with 8 GPU each (16 total), and a management console. The rigs themselves run multiple open source containers where we can bring up 2, 4, or 8 GPU and assign them tasks from the open source work distribution console. Using GPU 2 and 3 generations behind currently available products, we achieved pre-fieldwork NTLM combined benchmarks of 240GHs testing NTLM</p>

via 12 character masks, and 25.6GHz via 10GB dictionary and a 3MB rules file. Actual speeds varied across multiple test configurations during the engagement.

The vast majority—99.99 percent—of passwords cracked by the auditors complied with the department’s password complexity requirements, which mandate a minimum of 12 characters, and contain at least three of four character types consisting of uppercase, lowercase, digits, and special characters. The audit uncovered what Ars has been [saying for almost a decade](#) now—such guidelines are usually meaningless.

That’s because the guides assume attackers will use brute force methods, in which every possible combination is methodically tried in alphanumeric order. It’s far more common for attackers to use lists of previously cracked passwords, which are available on the Internet. Attackers then plug the lists into rigs that contain dozens of super-fast GPUs that try each word in the order of popularity of each string.

“Even though a password [such as Password-1234] meets requirements because it includes uppercase, lowercase, digits, and a special character, it is extremely easy to crack,” the final report noted. “The second most frequently used password was Br0nc0\$2012. Although this may appear to be a ‘stronger’ password, it is, in practice, very weak because it is based on a single dictionary word with common character replacements.”

The report noted that [NIST SP 800–63 Digital Identity Guidelines](#) recommend long passphrases made up of multiple unrelated words because they’re more difficult for a computer to crack. Ars has long recommended using a password manager to create random passphrases and store them.

Sadly, even the department’s inspector general can’t be relied on for completely reliable password advice. The auditors faulted the department for failing to change passwords every 60 days as required. Plenty of government and corporate policies continue to mandate such changes, even though most password security experts have concluded that they just [encourage weak password choices](#). The better advice is to use a strong, randomly generated password that’s unique for every account and change it only when there’s reason to believe it might have been compromised.

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HEADLINE	01/11 DDoS attacks hit Denmark central bank
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/ddos-attacks-denmark-central-bank/
GIST	<p>The official websites of Denmark’s central bank and seven other private banks in the country were hit by a series of massive DDoS attacks on Tuesday, January 10th, 2022. The attacks caused them to be inaccessible to users, according to the central bank.</p> <p>Along with the websites of the central bank, Bankdata—a company that develops IT solutions for the financial industry—was also targeted by a DDoS attack.</p> <p>What is a DDoS attack?</p> <p>A DDoS attack, or Distributed Denial of Service attack, is a malicious cyberattack used to disrupt the availability of a service to its intended users. It’s an attack that attempts to make an online service unavailable by flooding it with an overwhelming amount of traffic from multiple sources.</p> <p>DDoS attacks are often large-scale and can target web servers, networks, applications, and Internet-connected (IoT) devices. During DDoS attacks, attackers send a huge volume of requests to the targeted resource in order to saturate its network bandwidth or resources.</p> <p>This forces the server to slow down drastically or even crash completely, making it unavailable for legitimate users. The goal is usually either financial gain through ransom demands or simply disruption and destruction.</p> <p>Current Status</p>

	<p>As for the latest attack on Danish banks; a spokesperson for the central bank told Reuters that its website was working normally on Tuesday afternoon, and the attack did not impact the bank's other systems or day-to-day operations.</p> <p>Due to the DDoS attack on Bankdata, seven private banks' websites were affected and could not be accessed, a company spokesperson said. The banks included two of Denmark's largest, Jyske Bank and Sydbank, they said.</p> <p>Sydbank confirmed on its Facebook page that access to its website had been restricted on Tuesday. A Jyske spokesperson confirmed some customers had experienced problems accessing its website on Tuesday.</p> <p>At the time of writing, all targeted websites, including the National Bank's website, were restored and available online.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 StrongPity hackers target Android users
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/strongpity-hackers-target-android-users-via-trojanized-telegram-app/
GIST	<p>The StrongPity APT hacking group is distributing a fake Shagle chat app that is a trojanized version of the Telegram for Android app with an added backdoor.</p> <p>Shagle is a legitimate random-video-chat platform allowing strangers to talk via an encrypted communications channel. However, the platform is entirely web-based, not offering a mobile app.</p> <p>StrongPity has been found using a fake website since 2021 that impersonates the actual Shagle site to trick victims into downloading a malicious Android.</p> <p>Once installed, this app enables the hackers to conduct espionage on the targeted victims, including monitoring phone calls, collecting SMS texts, and grabbing contact lists.</p> <p>StrongPity, also known as Promethium or APT-C-41, was previously attributed to a campaign that distributed trojanized Notepad++ installers and malicious versions of WinRAR and TrueCrypt to infect targets with malware.</p> <p>The latest StrongPity activity was discovered by ESET researchers who attributed the campaign to the espionage APT group based on code similarities with past payloads.</p> <p>Additionally, the Android app is signed with the same certificate the APT used to sign an app that mimicked the Syrian e-gov Android application in a 2021 campaign.</p> <p>Trojanizing the Android Telegram app</p> <p>The malicious Android application distributed by StrongPity is an APK file named "video.apk," the standard Telegram v7.5.0 (February 2022) app modified to impersonate a Shagle mobile app.</p> <p>ESET couldn't determine how victims arrive on the fake Shagle website, but it's likely through spear phishing emails, smishing (SMS phishing), or instant messages on online platforms.</p> <p>The malicious APK is provided directly from the fake Shagle site and has never been made available on Google Play.</p> <p>ESET says the cloned site first appeared online on November 2021, so the APK has likely been under active distribution since then. However, the first confirmed detection in the wild came in July 2022.</p> <p>One drawback of using Telegram as the basis for the hacking group's fake app is that if the victim already has the real Telegram app installed on their phones, the backdoored version won't be installed.</p>

	<p>Currently, the API ID used in the captured samples has been limited due to overuse, so the trojanized app will no longer accept new user registrations; hence, the backdoor won't work.</p> <p>ESET believes this indicates that StrongPity has successfully deployed the malware on targeted victims.</p> <p>The StrongPity hacking group has been active since 2012, commonly hiding backdoors in legitimate software installers. Based on ESET's report, the threat actor continues to employ the same tactic after a decade.</p> <p>Android users should be cautious with APKs sourced outside Google Play and pay attention to permission requests while installing new apps.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Lorenz ransomware gang plants backdoors
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/lorenz-ransomware-gang-plants-backdoors-to-use-months-later/
GIST	<p>Security researchers are warning that patching critical vulnerabilities allowing access to the network is insufficient to defend against ransomware attacks.</p> <p>Some gangs are exploiting the flaws to plan a backdoor while the window of opportunity exists and may return long after the victim applied the necessary security updates.</p> <p>One case is a Lorenz ransomware attack that reached completion months after the hackers gained access to the victim's network using an exploit for a critical bug in a telephony system.</p> <p>Backdoor planted before security update</p> <p>During an incident response engagement to a Lorenz ransomware attack, researchers at global intelligence and cyber security consulting company S-RM determined that the hackers had breached the victim network five months before starting to move laterally, steal data, and encrypt systems.</p> <p>S-RM determined that the hackers gained initial access by exploiting CVE-2022-29499, a critical vulnerability in the Mitel telephony infrastructure, which allows remote code execution.</p> <p>The security issue was discovered last year in an investigation from CrowdStrike Services into “a suspected ransomware intrusion attempt.” At that time, the vendor did not know about the vulnerability and a fix had yet to come.</p> <p>S-RM researchers found that while their client had applied the patch for CVE-2022-29499 in July, the Lorenz ransomware hackers moved faster and exploited the vulnerability, and planted a backdoor a week before the update that fixed the issue.</p> <p>“They leveraged vulnerabilities within two Mitel PHP pages on a CentOS system on the network perimeter, which allowed them to retrieve a web shell from their own infrastructure and install it on the system” - S-RM</p> <p>Although no vulnerable pages had remained on the system, forensic analysis revealed that they had been last accessed when the threat actor's web shell was created on the victim machine.</p> <p>The hackers tried to hide the backdoor by naming it “<i>twitter_icon_<ransom string></i>” and placed it in a legitimate location directory on the system.</p> <p>The web shell is a single line of PHP code that listens for HTTP POST requests with two parameters: “id,” which, together with the random string acts as credentials for system access, and “img,” which includes the commands to be executed.</p>

For five months, the web shell lay dormant on the victim network. When the hackers were ready to follow through with the attack, they used the backdoor and deployed the Lorenz ransomware in 48 hours.

Check for intrusion before applying critical bug fix

The S-RM researchers say that the long inactivity time could suggest that the ransomware group purchased their access to the victim network from a broker.

Another theory is that the Lorenz gang is sufficiently organized to have a dedicated branch that obtains initial access and protects it against possible hijacking by other intruders.

S-RM researchers Tim Geschwindt and Ailsa Wood [say](#) that threat actors typically take full advantage of a new vulnerability and try to find and compromise as many unpatched systems on the internet only to return at a later time to continue the attack.

They “assess that Lorenz is actively returning to old backdoors, checking they still have access and using them to launch ransomware attacks.”

For this reason, the two researchers note that updating software to the latest version at the right time is still an important step in defending the network but in the case of critical vulnerabilities, companies should also check their environment for exploit attempts and possible intrusions.

Reviewing logs, looking for unauthorized access or behavior, and checking network monitoring data for unexpected traffic could reveal an intrusion that would survive a security update.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Fake AnyDesk sites push stealer malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/over-1-300-fake-anydesk-sites-push-vidar-info-stealing-malware/
GIST	<p>A massive campaign using over 1,300 domains to impersonate the official AnyDesk site is underway, all redirecting to a Dropbox folder recently pushing the Vidar information-stealing malware.</p> <p>AnyDesk is a popular remote desktop application for Windows, Linux, and macOS, used by millions of people worldwide for secure remote connectivity or performing system administration.</p> <p>Due to the tool's popularity, malware distribution campaigns often abuse the AnyDesk brand. For example, in October 2022, Cyble reported that the operators of Mitsu Stealer were using an AnyDesk phishing site to push their new malware.</p> <p>The new ongoing AnyDesk campaign was spotted by SEKOIA threat analyst creplix, who warned about it on Twitter and shared the complete list of the malicious hostnames. All of these hostnames resolve to the same IP address of 185.149.120[.]9.</p> <p>The list of the hostnames includes typosquats for AnyDesk, MSI Afterburner, 7-ZIP, Blender, Dashlane, Slack, VLC, OBS, cryptocurrency trading apps, and other popular software.</p> <p>At the time of writing this, most domains are still online, while others have been reported and taken offline by the registrars or are blocked by AV tools. Even for the sites that are up, their Dropbox links no longer work after the malicious file was reported to the cloud storage service.</p> <p>However, as this campaign all point to the same site, the threat actor can easily fix this by updating the download URL to another site.</p> <p>All sites lead to Vidar Stealer</p>

In the newly discovered campaign, the sites were distributing a ZIP file named 'AnyDeskDownload.zip' [[VirusTotal](#)] that pretended to be an installer for the AnyDesk software.

However, instead of installing the remote access software, it installs Vidar stealer, an information-stealing malware circulating since 2018.

When installed, the malware will steal victims' browser history, account credentials, saved passwords, cryptocurrency wallet data, banking information, and other sensitive data. This data is then sent back to the attackers, who could use it for further malicious activity or sell it to other threat actors.

Instead of hiding the malware payload behind redirections to evade detection and takedowns, the recent Vidar campaign used the Dropbox file hosting service, which is trusted by AV tools, to deliver the payload.

BleepingComputer has recently seen Vidar being pushed by a campaign relying on over 200 typosquatting domains that [impersonated 27 software brands](#).

Another campaign pushing Vidar via Google Ads abuse was spotted by [Guardio Labs](#) at the end of December 2022, also abusing the AnyDesk brand among others.

A few days ago, SEKOIA published a report revealing another massive info-stealer distribution campaign [using 128 websites](#) that promote cracked software.

Users typically end up on these sites after searching Google for pirated versions of software and games. They are then led to 108 second-stage domains that redirect them to the final destination of 20 domains that deliver the malicious payloads.

However, as the researcher told BleepingComputer, there's no overlap between the two campaigns.

Users are advised to bookmark the sites they use for downloading software, avoid clicking on promoted results (ads) in Google Search, and find the official URL of a software project from their Wikipedia page, documentation, or your OS's package manager.

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HEADLINE	01/11 Group targets govt., military APAC region
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-dark-pink-apt-group-targets-govt-and-military-with-custom-malware/
GIST	<p>Attacks targeting government agencies and military bodies in multiple countries in the APAC region have been attributed to what appears to be a new advanced threat actor that leverages custom malware to steal confidential information.</p> <p>Security researchers refer to this group as Dark Pink (Group-IB) or Saaiwc Group (Anheng Hunting Labs), noting that it employs uncommon tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs).</p> <p>The custom toolkit observed in the attacks can be used to steal information and spread malware via USB drives. The actor used DLL side-loading and event-triggered execution methods to run its payloads on compromised systems.</p> <p>A report published by cybersecurity company Group-IB says that the threat actor's goal is to steal information from the victim's browsers, gain access to messengers, exfiltrate documents, and capture audio from the infected device microphone.</p> <p>Considered an advanced persistent threat (APT), Dark Pink has launched at least seven successful attacks between June and December 2022.</p>

Initial compromise

Dark Pink's typical initial attack vector is spear-phishing emails disguised as job applications, which tricked the victim into downloading a malicious ISO image file. Beyond this step, Group-IB saw multiple variations in the attack chain.

One of them used an all-inclusive ISO file storing a decoy document, a signed executable, and a malicious DLL file, which led to deploying one of the two custom information stealer used by the group (Ctealer or Cucky) via DLL side-loading. In the next stage, a registry implant called TelePowerBot would be dropped.

Another attack chain uses a Microsoft Office document (.DOC) inside an ISO file. When the victim opens the file, a template with a malicious macro is fetched from GitHub, tasked with loading TelePowerBot and perform Windows registry changes.

A third attack chain observed in December 2022 was identical to the first one. However, instead of loading TelePowerBot, the malicious ISO file and the DLL side-loading technique load another custom malware that researchers call KamiKakaBot, designed to read and execute commands.

Custom malware

Cucky and Ctealer are custom info-stealers written in .NET and C++, respectively. Both attempt to locate and extract passwords, browsing history, saved logins, and cookies from a long list of web browsers: Chrome, Microsoft Edge, CocCoc, Chromium, Brave, Atom, Uran, Sputnik, Slimjet, Epic Privacy, Amigo, Vivaldi, Kometa, Nichrome, Maxthon, Comodo Dragon, Avast Secure Browser, and Yandex Browser.

TelePowerBot is a registry implant that launches via a script at system boot and connects to a Telegram channel from where it receives PowerShell commands to execute.

In general, the commands can start simple console tools or complex PowerShell scripts that enable lateral movement via USB removable drives.

KamiKakaBot is the .NET version of TelePowerBot, which also comes with information stealing capabilities, targeting data stored in Chrome-based and Firefox browsers.

In addition to these tools, Dark Pink also uses a script to record sound through the microphone every minute. The data is saved as a ZIP archive in the Windows temporary folder before it is exfiltrated to the Telegram bot.

Similarly, the threat actor uses a special messenger exfiltration utility named ZMsg, downloaded from GitHub. The utility steals communications from Viber, Telegram, and Zalo and stores them on “%TEMP%\KoVosRLvmU\” until they are exfiltrated.

A previous report from the Chinese cybersecurity company Anheng Hunting Labs, who track Dark Pink as Saaiwc Group, [describes some attack chains](#) and notes that in one of them the actor used a Microsoft Office template with malicious macro code to exploit an older, high-severity vulnerability identified as [CVE-2017-0199](#).

Although Group-IB confirms with high confidence that Dark Pink is responsible for seven attacks, the researchers note that the number could be higher.

The company has informed all seven organizations of the threat actor's compromise activity and will continue to track Dark Pink's operations.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Pakistan govt. warns agencies on darkweb
SOURCE	https://www.theregister.com/2023/01/10/pakistan_dark_web_warning/?&web_view=true

GIST	<p>Pakistan's government has warned its agencies that the dark web exists, is home to all sorts of unpleasant people, and should be avoided.</p> <p>That revelatory information was delivered last week in a cabinet advisory [PDF] titled "Leakage of Sensitive Data on Dark Web (Advisory No.53)" that was issued without fanfare.</p> <p>Much of the document is anodyne, pointing out that the anonymity afforded by the dark web attracts criminals and scammers.</p> <p>But it is also notable for making several mentions of terrorists using the hidden networks, either to arrange their finances (sometimes using cryptocurrency) or to radicalize and recruit targets. Domestic terrorism and insurgencies are major issues in Pakistan. Linking the dark web to terrorism therefore associates the networks with threats to national security.</p> <p>The document suggests hostile intelligence agencies also use the dark web. Pakistan is one of China's closest friends, but has also been courted by the West as a local counterweight against the influence of Iran and the Afghan Taliban. Many nations' intelligence agencies are therefore keenly interested in Pakistani affairs.</p> <p>Pakistan's government suggests that its agencies adopt various tactics to prevent their data leaking to the dark web, the first of which can be summarised as "don't use it". Agencies are also told to use multi-factor authentication and reminded "Never forward, click/view link or pictures shared on email/WhatsApp by unknown sources/numbers".</p> <p>Installing only digitally signed software from known good sources is also advised, while "unnecessary plugins on browsers except Adblock and Adblock plus" are not allowed.</p> <p>The document also offers advice on how to avoid dark web entanglements while talking on the phone, such as not sharing passwords or personal information, and asking "relevant questions from caller and carefully judge him/her to ensure authenticity."</p> <p>It is unclear why Pakistan's government has decided now is the time to issue this advice, as no notable leaks or cracks have recently occurred. However the nation was shocked in October 2022 when audio of conversations from within the Prime Minister's office was leaked and appeared on social media. Some of the conversations that emerged were personal and tawdry, others were politically explosive because they mentioned imports from India.</p> <p>Pakistan/India relations are extremely frosty and the former tries to avoid activity that would benefit its neighbor.</p> <p>Investigations into the leaks are ongoing. Perhaps some infosec advice about the perils of the dark web will prevent future incidents of the same sort.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Xdr33: CIA Hive variant emerges
SOURCE	https://blog.netlab.360.com/headsup_xdr33_variant_of_ciahive_emeerges/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Overview</p> <p>On Oct 21, 2022, 360Netlab's honeypot system captured a suspicious ELF file ee07a74d12c0bb3594965b51d0e45b6f, which propagated via F5 vulnerability with zero VT detection, our system observes that it communicates with IP 45.9.150.144 using SSL with forged Kaspersky certificates, this caught our attention. After further lookup, we confirmed that this sample was adapted from the leaked Hive project server source code from CIA. This is the first time we caught a variant of the CIA HIVE attack kit in the wild, and we named it xdr33 based on its embedded Bot-side certificate CN=xdr33.</p>

To summarize, xdr33 is a backdoor born from the CIA Hive project, its main purpose is to collect sensitive information and provide a foothold for subsequent intrusions. In terms of network communication, xdr33 uses XTEA or AES algorithm to encrypt the original traffic, and uses SSL with Client-Certificate Authentication mode enabled to further protect the traffic; in terms of function, there are two main tasks: beacon and trigger, of which beacon is periodically report sensitive information about the device to the hard-coded Beacon C2 and execute the commands issued by it, while the trigger is to monitor the NIC traffic to identify specific messages that conceal the Trigger C2, and when such messages are received, it establishes communication with the Trigger C2 and waits for the execution of the commands issued by it.

Hive uses the BEACON_HEADER_VERSION macro to define the specified version, which has a value of 29 on the Master branch of the source code and a value of 34 in xdr33, so perhaps xdr33 has had several rounds of iterative updates already. Comparing with the HIV source code, xdr33 has been updated in the following 5 areas:

- New CC instructions have been added
- Wrapping or expanding functions
- Structs have been reordered and extended
- Trigger message format
- Addition of CC operations to the Beacon task

These modifications to xdr33 are not very sophisticated in terms of implementation, and coupled with the fact that the vulnerability used in this spread is N-day, we tend to rule out the possibility that the CIA continued to improve on the leaked source code and consider it to be the result of a cyber attack group borrowing the leaked source code.

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HEADLINE	01/09 Report: darkweb drug trafficking
SOURCE	https://securityaffairs.com/140538/cyber-crime/drug-trafficking-dark-web.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Resecurity, a Los Angeles-based cybersecurity and risk management provider has released an eye-opening report on drug trafficking marketplaces currently operating in the Dark Web. The report highlights a rapidly growing shadow economy, and new communication methods such as proprietary Android-based mobile apps criminals developed allowing them to migrate from traditional communication channels.</p> <p>According to experts, following the takedown of the Hydra Marketplace by Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office in a joint operation with the FBI, DEA, IRS Criminal Investigations, and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in April 2022, at least 10 darknet markets (DNMs) have risen to fill the regional void for drugs and other illicit goods.</p> <p>Resecurity outlined a new marketplace called "Kraken", which emerged right at the start of 2023 following the Christmas holidays and was designed in Hydra's best tradition. Launched by the WayAway Market founders, it has already accumulated over 1,720 reputable sellers and shops selling illicit goods.</p> <p>At the end of 2022, major Dark Web drug markets were worth an estimated \$315 million annually according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Resecurity estimates this figure to be significantly higher in 2023, the annual sale of illegal drugs on the Dark Web for 2022 exceeded \$470 million – which is the result of increased geopolitical tensions, global pandemics, and the unprecedented growth of the international shadow economy.</p> <p>The Resecurity® Hunter unit performed an extensive analysis of current trends and dynamics related to the underground economy around active DNMs leveraging technical means and human intelligence (HUMINT) sources. The research aims to provide awareness for international law enforcement, cybercrime investigators and intelligence professionals.</p> <p>Based on the details provided in the released report over the summer of 2022, most pop-up markets on the dark web were primarily fighting for brand recognition, much like a 'cyber-90s' type of environment. Resecurity detailed the increasing tensions between different influence groups behind illegal marketplaces</p>

in Dark Web – attacking each other, performing DDoS attacks and trying to abuse the reputation of competitors to capture a bigger market share.

Notably, a dominating number of actors moved from the now closed Hydra to new marketplaces, and have started leveraging alternative digital channels – customized mobile apps and Instant Messengers (IM) including Telegram. Some channels have been identified by Resecurity; they are oriented towards English / German speaking audiences.

The ecosystem of drug sales on the Dark Web pose threats internationally, several epicenters primarily concentrated in Eurasia and Central Asia and actively used for drugs trafficking are outlined in the report.

Resecurity has identified multiple drug shops on the Dark Web providing customers with customized Android-based mobiles with pre-installed apps used for purchases and secure communications, as well as sending instructions to couriers. The significance of this trend is increasing OPSEC measures (of threat actors) and a visible shift from traditional communication channels and apps to proprietary (developed by other actors operating in the Dark Web).

These mobile apps are actively used by criminals to facilitate purchases, transactions, logistics, and to chat with their customers. Such interactions could be to discuss physical drop off points with specific instructions for example: The physical drop location with GPS coordinates, if buried then how deep it's been buried at a specific GPS location, a photo of the location to help the buyers pinpoint the exact spot may also be included.

As the illicit trade of drugs continues to flourish in the dark web, it has become very clear illegal narcotics are not the only substances booming in Q1 of 2023. Resecurity noticed a sharp increase in demand for prescription pharmaceuticals. Such pharmaceuticals include Adderall, Atomoxetine, Mersyndol Forte Codeine, Morphine Zomorph Ethypharm, Oxycontin, and many others that are readily available on DNMs. Aside from prescription pharmaceuticals used to treat conditions such as extreme pain, anxiety, ADHD, Insomnia and many other ailments, male performance drugs such as Viagra, Cialis, and Kamagra Oral Jelly are also seeing a spike in popularity.

With counterfeit prescription Pharmaceuticals flooding the dark web, damage to both people and the legitimate pharmaceutical companies is becoming ever clearer.

Counterfeit prescription drugs can be difficult to spot, as they are often made to look like the real thing. They may have fake labels, packaging, and even holograms, making them indistinguishable from legitimate medications. In some cases, the drugs may contain only a small amount of the active ingredient, or none at all, meaning they are ineffective at best and potentially dangerous at worst. The consequences of taking counterfeit prescription drugs can be serious and even life-threatening. These drugs may contain toxic or unregulated ingredients that can cause serious side effects, including organ damage, heart attack, stroke, and even death. In addition, taking these drugs may delay or prevent proper treatment for the underlying medical condition, leading to further complications.

The best way to protect yourself from counterfeit prescription drugs is to only buy medications from reputable sources. This includes licensed pharmacies, either in person or online, that require a prescription from a licensed healthcare provider. It is also important to be aware of any red flags that may indicate a fake or unlicensed pharmacy, such as offers of prescription drugs without a prescription, extremely low prices, or unprofessional websites. Counterfeit prescription drugs sold on the dark web pose a serious threat to public health. These drugs may be ineffective or contain harmful ingredients and can have potentially deadly consequences for those who take them. To protect yourself and your loved ones, it is important to only buy medications from reputable sources and be aware of any red flags that may indicate a fake or unlicensed pharmaceuticals.

Resecurity forecasts an active growth curve in the Dark Web ecosystem centered around illegal drugs and counterfeit pharmaceuticals in light of post-pandemics and complicated geopolitical agendas preventing law enforcement from operative cooperation. Resecurity provides specialized intelligence products for law

	enforcement which help track underground activity, and highlights the need to build advanced tactics towards threats originating from the Dark Web.
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HEADLINE	01/10 Russian hackers targeted US nuclear labs
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/jgpz88/russian-hackers-tried-to-break-into-the-uss-top-nuclear-labs-report
GIST	<p>Hackers tied to a Russian bodybuilder and IT worker attempted to hack American nuclear research labs last year, according to a report from Reuters. The hacking group Cold River used phishing techniques in an attempt to access the Brookhaven, Argonne, and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories.</p> <p>According to Reuters, Cold River ran its scheme during the summer months of 2022. The group created fake login pages for the labs and emailed scientists in an attempt to trick them into logging in. It's unclear if the hacks were successful or what, exactly, Cold River was trying to access at the labs.</p> <p>Cold River used email accounts to register domain names that look similar to legitimate links. At a glance the emails look like they're coming from Microsoft or Google, but they redirect to a page the hacker has set up. Once the victim puts their information in the site, the hacker has it and can use it to access the legitimate pages. Similar phishing scams have been used in the past to great effect. The 2014 Sony Hack, which saw terabytes of personal emails leaked online, was the result of a phishing scheme.</p> <p>Reuters was not able to determine why, specifically, the labs were targeted. They are America's top nuclear research facilities, and their remit includes a wide range of topics such as nuclear fusion power—scientists at Lawrence Livermore recently announced they had achieved fusion ignition, an important milestone. In addition to basic nuclear physics and energy research, the facilities conduct research related to national security and maintaining the U.S.'s nuclear weapons stockpile.</p> <p>This isn't the only hack tied to Cold River. According to security researchers, the group registered domain names imitating NGOs that investigate Russian war crimes in 2022. In May, 2002, Cold River leaked emails from a Proton account that belonged to Richard Dearlove, the former head of British spy agency MI6. The group also targeted the British Foreign office in 2016.</p> <p>Cyber security firms have tied Cold River's activities to the Russian national Andrey Stanislavovich Korinets, a bodybuilder and IT worker, Reuters reported. Korinets has ties to the Russian hacking community and confirmed to Reuters that he owned email accounts used by the group, but denied knowing anything about Cold River's activities.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Siemens in widespread logic controller flaw
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/siemens-s7-1500-logic-controller-flaw/#intcid=wired-verso-hp-trending_9eaf708b-84df-4564-a4eb-b0ba03d2feed_popular4-1
GIST	<p>IN 2009, THE computer worm Stuxnet crippled hundreds of centrifuges inside Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment plant by targeting the software running on the facility's industrial computers, known as programmable logic controllers. The exploited PLCs were made by the automation giant Siemens and were all models from the company's ubiquitous, long-running SIMATIC S7 product series. Now, more than a decade later, Siemens disclosed today that a vulnerability in its S7-1500 series could be exploited by an attacker to silently install malicious firmware on the devices and take full control of them.</p> <p>The vulnerability was discovered by researchers at the embedded device security firm Red Balloon Security after they spent more than a year developing a methodology to evaluate the S7-1500's firmware, which Siemens has encrypted for added protection since 2013. Firmware is the low-level code that coordinates hardware and software on a computer. The vulnerability stems from a basic error in how the cryptography is implemented, but Siemens can't fix it through a software patch because the scheme is physically burned onto a dedicated ATECC CryptoAuthentication chip. As a result, Siemens says it has no fix planned for any of the 122 S7-1500 PLC models that the company lists as being vulnerable.</p>

Siemens says that because the vulnerability requires physical access to exploit on its own, customers should mitigate the threat by assessing “the risk of physical access to the device in the target deployment” and implementing “measures to make sure that only trusted personnel have access to the physical hardware.” The researchers point out, though, that the vulnerability could potentially be chained with other remote access vulnerabilities on the same network as the vulnerable S7-1500 PLCs to deliver the malicious firmware without in-person contact. The Stuxnet attackers famously [used tainted USB thumb drives](#) as a creative vector to introduce their malware into “[air-gapped](#)” networks and ultimately infect then-current S7-300 and 400 series PLCs.

“Siemens PLCs are used in very important industrial capacities around the world, many of which are potentially very attractive targets of attacks, as with Stuxnet and the nuclear centrifuges,” says Grant Skipper, a Red Balloon Security research scientist.

The ubiquity and criticality of S7-1500 PLCs are the two traits that motivated the researchers to do a deep dive into the security of the devices. To a motivated and well-resourced attacker, any flaws could be worth exploiting.

“The encrypted firmware means that without a lot of effort, you don’t have any insight inside a device, so we wanted to see what was hiding in the 1500 product line,” says Red Balloon Security research scientist Yuanzhe Wu. “The devices use a dedicated cryptography coprocessor to verify the encrypted firmware that’s loaded on the device, decrypt the firmware, and let the device boot. However, we found vulnerabilities that an attacker could abuse to make the crypto coprocessor act like an oracle to decrypt firmware and then help tamper with it to make malicious modifications.”

Since firmware underlies a device’s functions, the ability to silently modify the firmware would undermine all other security protections and give an attacker total control of the device without its owner realizing that anything has changed.

“This separate crypto core is a very rudimentary chip. It’s not like a big processor, so it doesn’t really know who it’s talking to or what’s going on in the broader context,” Red Balloon’s Skipper says. “So if you can tell it the right things that you observed the processor telling it, it will talk to you as if you are the processor. So we can get in between the processor and the crypto core and then we basically tell it, ‘Hey, we are the processor and we are going to give you some data and we want you to encrypt it.’ And the little crypto core isn’t going to question that. It just does it.”

Siemens notes that the vulnerabilities are not related to the company’s own firmware update process and do not give attackers the ability to hijack that distribution channel. But the fact that any S7-1500 can become a firmware-blessing oracle is significant and bestows a power that individual devices should not have, undermining the whole purpose of encrypting the firmware in the first place.

“S7s should not be able to re-encrypt firmware for other S7s,” says Ang Cui, Red Balloon Security’s founder and CEO. “This is a fundamental design flaw and a significant implementation error.”

While Siemens isn’t directly releasing any fixes for the vulnerability, the company says it is in the process of releasing new-generation processor hardware that fixes the vulnerability for several S7-1500 models. And the company says it is “working on new hardware versions for remaining PLC types to address this vulnerability completely.” The Red Balloon researchers say they have not yet been able to independently validate that the vulnerability has been fixed in this latest S7-1500 hardware.

Still, the Red Balloon Security researchers say that it would be possible for Siemens to release a firmware audit tool for any PLC to check whether there has been tampering on the device. Since the vulnerability will persist on impacted devices, such a feature would give S7-1500 owners more insight into their PLCs and the ability to monitor them for suspicious activity.

	<p>“It’s the same movie, just a different day,” says Red Balloon’s Cui. “Does very complicated, exotic hardware security improve overall security? Well, if you do it right, it could help, but I haven’t seen any human do it right. When you do it wrong, it always becomes a double-edged sword—and the edge of that sword is very sharp.”</p> <p>Though Siemens says it is addressing the S7-1500 vulnerability in new models, the population of vulnerable 1500s in industrial control and critical infrastructure systems around the world is extensive, and these units will remain in use for decades.</p> <p>“Siemens is saying that this will not be fixed, so it’s not just a zero day—this will remain a forever day until all the vulnerable 1500s go out of service,” Cui says. “It could be dangerous to leave this unaddressed.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 First cryptocurrency insider trading case
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-man-sentenced-10-months-cryptocurrency-insider-trading/32BT3HKV3FAEDGYVZDTSC2RWBA/
GIST	<p>The brother of a former Coinbase product manager was sentenced to 10 months in prison on Tuesday in what federal prosecutors have called the first insider trading case involving cryptocurrency.</p> <p>Nikhil Wahi, 27, of Seattle, was sentenced in federal court in Manhattan after pleading guilty in September to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud.</p> <p>Prosecutors said that Nikhil Wahi began in around October 2020 to receive confidential tips from his brother, Ishan Wahi — then a product manager for Coinbase Global Inc., one of the world’s largest cryptocurrency exchanges — and used the information to sell crypto assets for a profit.</p> <p>Both Wahi brothers and a friend, Sameer Ramani, were charged in July in what U.S. Attorney Damian Williams described as the government’s first insider trading case involving cryptocurrency markets.</p> <p>Williams said Tuesday’s sentence “makes clear that the cryptocurrency markets are not lawless. There are real consequences to illegal insider trading, wherever and whenever it occurs.”</p> <p>In addition to the prison sentence, Nikhil Wahi was ordered to pay \$892,500.</p> <p>Ishan Wahi has pleaded not guilty to the charges against him, and Ramani is at large.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Students question Seattle schools’ lawsuit
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/education/seattle-public-school-students-district-sues-social-media-companies/281-427fbc07-88e4-4232-8d35-123048ed7049
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Some students within Seattle Public Schools are questioning the district's decision to sue major social media companies.</p> <p>Seattle Public Schools is suing major social media companies over the impact on teen mental health.</p> <p>Natalya McConnell, one of the founders of the Seattle Student Union, and fellow classmate Israr Rukun said they aren't disputing that social media is bad for mental health, but they wonder what the school district is trying to accomplish with the lawsuit.</p> <p>“I do agree that TikTok and other social media plays a detrimental part in mental health, but I don’t believe that SPS has a right to look externally for blame when they themselves are responsible for a lot of it,” said Rukun.</p>

The 92-page lawsuit claims the social media giants violated Washington's public nuisance law and intentionally contributed to the youth mental health crisis in the state. The lawsuit claims the district and its more than 49,000 students have been directly impacted.

McConnell said the lawsuit feels performative.

"We as students in the Seattle Student Union - and especially after the Ingraham student just a couple months ago where a student was shot and killed - we spoke up and said this is what we need," McConnell said. "We need mental health counselors in every school to address the mental health crisis and right now the district took that and said, OK, we're going to do a lawsuit against social media companies. That's not what we asked for. We asked for mental health counselors."

The Global Head of Safety for Meta, the company which owns Facebook and Instagram, responded to SPS's suit saying, "We want teens to be safe online ... We automatically set teens' accounts to private when they join Instagram, and we send notifications encouraging them to take regular breaks. We don't allow content that promotes suicide, self-harm or eating disorders."

A spokesperson for Google, which owns YouTube, also provided a response to the suit, telling KING 5, "We have invested heavily in creating safe experiences for children ... We provide parents with the ability to set reminders, limit screen time and block specific types of content on supervised devices."

In the latest budget, Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell allocated \$4 million to provide resources for teen mental health, which Natalya said is not enough.

After the Ingraham High School shooting in November, [where a 17-year-old was shot and killed by a 14-year-old](#), Seattle Public Schools announced it would create a child wellbeing council.

Students later held a walk out and rally with a list of demands, including asking for more mental health counselors in schools.

"The district, before they carry out a lawsuit which is very expensive, they should have looked inward and addressed the problems that are actually in our schools that they themselves can solve," said McConnell.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Snohomish Co. gift cards balance thefts
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/gift-card-balance-theft-snohomish-county/281-15f6ea82-1ff9-4624-82ed-8fe6bfc90d4f
GIST	<p>SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash. — Many people received gift cards this holiday season, but some are finding out the balance is gone before they have a chance to use it.</p> <p>Dozens of people in Snohomish County are having problems with gift cards purchased at area grocery stores. Many people we heard from say Amazon and Visa gift cards were the most common types. Victims say they bought the cards off the rack, and once activated, the balance had been drained by someone else.</p> <p>Over the past year, Torrie Amaratunge's family had this happen twice, with gift cards that were gifted to them by two different people. One was a VISA gift card for \$50 and the other was an Amazon gift card for \$250. Both cards had their full balance stolen.</p> <p>"So, my husband's boss got him a gift card for Christmas," said Amaratunge. "It should have been \$250. But when we got around to spending it, it was zero."</p> <p>This has been a common occurrence in Snohomish County, with dozens of people on one Nextdoor post sharing similar experiences with gift cards bought from area grocery stores.</p>

“When I saw the response online that other people were going through this, I was like, something needs to be done,” said Amaratunge.

Most people on the post said when they tried to get money back, they were unsuccessful. They said neither the grocery stores or the companies the gift cards were for would take accountability. People on Nextdoor believe the gift card information is stolen from the cards hanging in the store and then they are put back on the shelf. Once activated, they believe the thieves use the card before the recipient can.

“Maybe by keeping the gift card behind the counter,” said Amaratunge when discussing ideas to fix the problem. “Or like Costco, you take the little receipt thingy and you take it to the cashier, and then the cashier scans it and then brings you whatever gift card you buy.”

No matter the solution, Amaratunge said there is a problem hurting real people.

“Everything is tight right now for a lot of people, everything's going up,” said Amaratunge of the current economy. “So, sometimes those gift cards can make a difference between if these kids eat or not that day.”

It is a problem she said needs to be fixed by the stores selling the cards.

“They cash the check, they took the funds out of these folks’ account, but they're not being accountable for that, and that's not acceptable,” said Amaratunge.

KING 5 reached out to Fred Meyer, which many people referenced as the place they bought gift cards that had these issues.

Fred Meyer said in a statement:

“Fred Meyer trains our associates to be vigilant in identifying fraudulent activity to help protect our customers. If a customer purchases a gift card from one of the Fred Meyer stores and it has been tampered with, we encourage them to visit the store or contact our Kroger Customer Relations Center by phone at 1-866-544-8062 or email paymentsupport@kroger.com to open a case for research and response.”

KING 5 also reached out to the Washington Attorney General’s Office about this issue and did not hear back by the time this article was published.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Malware-based attacks on ATMs
SOURCE	https://blog.nviso.eu/2023/01/10/malware-based-attacks-on-atms-a-summary/
GIST	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Today we will take a first look at malware-based attacks on ATMs in general, while future articles will go into more detail on the individual subtopics.</p> <p>ATMs have been robbed by criminal gangs around the world for decades. A successful approach since ~ 20 years is the use of highly flammable gas, which is fed into the ATM safe and ignited during a robbery.</p> <p>For an attacker, this is an inexpensive way to get the cash, but it also leads to great publicity and thus risk of being caught by security authorities. In addition, more and more vending machines are being equipped with systems that ink the money as soon as the machine is physically breached.</p> <p>Since the beginning of the 2010s, there has been a trend for more and more criminal gangs to switch to non-violent methods without explosives. We are talking about so-called physical malware attacks. Here, malicious software is brought onto the PC inside the ATM, for example, via a USB stick. This malware-based attack usually results in all cash inside the safe being ejected via the regular dispensing mechanism</p>

(cash-out attack). A successful attack would effectively put the malware in full command over the ATM thereby rendering it almost impossible to stop them.

Another aspect that cannot be ignored is that an infected ATM often enables attacks on other devices or services within the network. For example, for research and testing purposes, we were able to develop a malware that attacked all ATMs within the network from an infected device (initial ATM). The result was simultaneous cash withdrawal from all ATMs within the shared network. It was also interesting here that other devices such as a Raspberry Pi connected to the same network could achieve the same results as well.

Even though during the Covid pandemic in 2020 such malware-based attacks on ATMs decreased, a clear increase has been visible since the beginning of 2022. Malware to attack specific types of devices can be purchased today for about 1000USD within the darknet.

To protect against such attacks, it is necessary to prevent malware from being installed and executed. Through years of research and experience in real projects, we have been able to help ATM manufacturers and banks protect their devices from such attacks.

ATM Internals

Generally, an ATM consists of two components:

Safe

- Includes:
 - Cash dispenser
 - Cassettes containing banknotes
- Strongly protected by heavy locks and armored walls

Cabinet

- Includes the computer connected to other devices:
 - Card reader
 - Pin pad
 - Touch screen
 - Network components
 - etc.
- Mostly weakly protected from physical attack.
 - Unarmored: Door and walls are often made of thin plastic or sheet metal. Poor quality locks: locks are often no better than those on private mailboxes, which can be opened in seconds with a lockpick.
 - Often only one key for several ATMs is used.

The computer inside the cabinet usually runs on the Windows operating system, which in turn runs the application for legitimate use of the ATM. A user / bank customer should not be able to break out of this application (e.g. via the touchscreen) to access the underlying system. For this purpose, Windows generally runs in the so-called Kiosk mode, which limits the input options only to the necessary user functions within the application.

Input values within the user application via the touchscreen or pin pad, for example, are in turn processed by the software and then transmitted to other devices such as the cash dispenser via corresponding commands. This communication between the user application and internal devices takes place via the XFS standard (Extensions for Financial Services). This standard provides an interface (API) for the Windows Hardware Manager via which all applications can access it.

When the user initiates a transaction such as a cash withdrawal, the bank's processing center is also contacted, which validates the transaction and ultimately transmits the confirmation for withdrawal. The connection between the ATM and the processing center is generally made via a cable, but occasionally also wirelessly (WiFi or GSM).

Vulnerabilities to ATM malware

In general, we classify ATM vulnerabilities regarding malware attacks into three categories. The combination of vulnerabilities from these categories allows an attacker to dispense all cash or attack other systems on the same network in many cases.

Insufficient physical security

The first step for malware-based attacks is usually to open the cabinet in order to interact with the integrated computer via a plugged-in keyboard or special USB stick. Here, we came into contact with recurring security vulnerabilities in various assessments:

- The lock of the cabinet is insecure and can be opened with a lockpick within seconds.
- The housing (door and walls) are made of thin plastic or sheet metal and can be destroyed with minor effort.
- Locks from different ATMs can be opened with the same key. If an attacker obtains such a master key, they can often open all the ATMs in different branches.
- The keys are not secure against copying. If an attacker obtains a key, it can be copied as often as desired.
- Lack of security for e.g. USB interfaces. If an attacker succeeds in opening the cabinet, they will in almost all cases find unprotected (open) USB interfaces that allow interaction via keyboard.

Insufficient configuration of the system and peripheral devices

It is often the case that the XFS standard for communication between OS and peripherals is configured very insecurely. There is often no authentication at all between the peripherals and the OS. An attacker with access to the computer could execute malware to communicate with the cash dispenser, and thus cash-out all available money. In summary, we found the following recurring security flaws in the system and device configurations:

- Insufficient or even missing authentication between USB peripherals and the OS which would allow so called ATM black-box attacks.
- Lack of communication encryption between OS and peripherals. An attacker can thus often read sensitive card data and transactions of the user.
- Lack of hard disk encryption. An attacker can extract and read any hard disk content. In addition to various software that can be misused to further develop malware, we were also able to extract unencrypted videos and pictures of customers that were taken via the camera integrated in the ATM.
- Inadequate protection of the kiosk mode. If an attacker manages to open the cabinet and plug in a keyboard, they can often break out of the banking application using special keyboard shortcuts and thus access the underlying Windows system. However, in some cases this is also possible via the touch screen of the machine without having to open the cabinet.
- Boot from external storage media. ATMs are occasionally configured to boot from an attached storage medium such as a USB stick when they are restarted. If an attacker can boot into an alternative system in this way, hard disk contents can be completely extracted or even communicate directly with peripherals such as the cash dispenser.
- Inadequate or missing application control configuration. Today's malware or public enumeration tools are often executed via Powershell scripts or exe files. In many of our assessments, the case was that the execution of such software was insufficiently blocked or not blocked at all.
- Weak or missing AV solutions. The installation and execution of tools and malware is not or often insufficiently detected because weak AV software are used for protection or these are not up to date.

Insufficient network security

An attacker with access to the ATM's network interface (e.g. Ethernet) can attack other systems or services within the network. In one of our scenarios, it was even possible to dispense cash from all ATMs within the network. In general, such scenarios are based on the following vulnerabilities:

- Lack of or insufficient network access control. An attacker who has been able to connect to the ATM network via Ethernet often has full authorization to communicate with other systems on the same network. In many cases, infiltration of other devices or even the Active Directory is possible.

- Unencrypted communication to the backend. An attacker in a man-in-the-middle position between the processing center and the ATM can read sensitive transaction data, but also manipulate it to issue malformed funds.
- Lack of or insufficient authentication to the exposed ATM network service. Often, own (spoofed) backend commands can be sent to the exposed ATM service to make it cash out.

Attack Scenarios

Due to the large number of possible vulnerabilities, individual malware-based attack scenarios often arise.

Recommendations

In general, it is difficult to make all-encompassing recommendations for securing ATMs. Even in our current assessments, we are increasingly confronted with new and very individual security vulnerabilities. However, we can make general recommendations for securing ATMs against malware attacks, as some vulnerabilities are present on a regular basis:

- The computer should be in the safe. Securing the computer in the safe would probably be the best possible protection against malware-based attacks. Unfortunately, we could not detect such a protection in any of our analyses so far.
- If it is not possible to place the computer in the safe:
 - The cabinet housing and door should also be made of solid material. It should not be possible to open the lock of the cabinet using a lockpick. Generally, security locks or even digital locks with proper auditing possibilities should be used here. The cabinet of each ATM should only be able to be opened with an individual key.
 - Network devices such as switches should not be placed outside the ATM.
- All communication between ATM and backend should be encrypted according to current standards.
- All transactions between the ATM and the backend should be mutually authenticated for example using TLS mutual authentication.
- All unused services exposed by the ATM should be turned off.
- The firewall between the ATM and backend should be configured to allow remote access only to the service that is needed. All network services that are not needed should be turned off.
- Remote access should follow strict password policies or even better: key-based authentication mechanisms.
- Any communication between the OS and peripherals such as the cash dispenser should be encrypted. Here the ATM vendor can be consulted since it is usually a simple configuration that can be enabled.
- The OS as well as used applications should be updated regularly including hotfixes.
- It should not be possible to connect any peripheral (e.g. keyboard) to the computer and use it. One possibility would be to use local OS policies or third-party software to allow only explicit devices. However, one should be careful with such whitelisting, as the device IDs themselves can be spoofed.
- The execution of scripts or other software should be limited as much as possible and be restricted to only what is necessary. One possibility would be the use of Windows Applocker.
- Any software that is not needed (e.g. software used for development) should be removed.
- Hard disks should be fully encrypted.
- Access to the BIOS should be protected by e.g. setting a strong password.
- A boot from the hard disk of the ATM should be forced. It should not be possible to access the boot menu without authentication. In addition make sure to enable measured boot.
- AV solutions should be used and regularly updated. In general, we prefer the use of Windows Defender over third-party software.
- Abnormal behavior or communication regarding network but also peripherals should be logged and alarms triggered.

Conclusion

Malware-based attacks that rely on physical access are becoming increasingly popular. Today, however, we can already see some security improvements in current assessments. However, our experience shows that the improvement within the last years is still insufficient. Many protections could still be

circumvented to exploit initial vulnerabilities. This is usually not because manufacturers and banks deliberately avoid security precautions, but because the whole environment and its processes often do not allow simple security upgrades. Some examples are that to ensure proper network access control (NAC), all switches within all branches would have to be replaced, technical staff still needs an interface (e.g. USB) to perform administrative tasks on the ATM, etc.

In general, it turns out that criminal hacker gangs are always one step ahead and find ways to bypass current security measurements.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Pro-Ukraine hackers leak Russian data
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/pro-ukraine-hackers-leak-russian-data-in-hopes-someone-will-make-sense-of-it/
GIST	<p>In October, investigative journalists at Bellingcat identified a secretive group of Russian military engineers responsible for programming the flight paths of high-precision cruise missiles. Their attacks on Ukraine’s critical and civilian infrastructure had left millions of Ukrainians without electricity and heating and caused hundreds of civilian deaths and injuries.</p> <p>Bellingcat used open-source intelligence and leaked information from Russia’s underground data markets to identify people in this group.</p> <p>Such leaks have proven useful for investigative journalism groups – although it isn’t obvious what to do with terabytes of unstructured data, which is extremely difficult to analyze and verify, according to Aric Toler, director of training and research at Bellingcat.</p> <p>“Most big data dumps have a few interesting nuggets for every hundred or thousand boring, mundane, useless data points,” Toler told The Record.</p> <p>Since the start of the war in Ukraine, Bellingcat has seen a “gigantic surge” of new leaks from pro-Ukrainian hackers against Russia, according to Toler. American investigative reporter Emma Best, a founder of the whistleblower site Distributed Denial of Secrets (DDoSecrets), told The Record in July that hackers had leaked over 12 million Russian documents to the organization since February.</p> <p>“Ukrainian hackers have data on almost every resident of Russia, even those who do not use a computer,” said Sean Townsend, spokesperson at the Ukrainian Cyber Alliance.</p> <p>Ukrainian hackers and their allies publish Russian data leaks almost daily. Among their targets are state agencies, such as the Central Bank of Russia and the media monitoring service Roskomnadzor, as well as civil companies such as the taxi aggregator Citymobil or the service for tour operators Level Travel.</p> <p>Russian hackers also leak data from Ukrainian networks, but these operations often have little strategic value to either side and are primarily useful from a propaganda perspective, said Gavin Wilde, an expert on Russia and information warfare.</p> <p>“The apparently opportunistic and uncoordinated nature of these operations also creates difficulty in separating potentially valuable insights from useless chaff,” he told The Record.</p> <p>For Ukrainian hackers, the value and practicality of leaked data are not necessarily the most important thing — they leak data to anger the Kremlin, draw attention to their activities, attract new members and distract their adversaries from more disruptive operations.</p> <p>Hackers usually leave it up to journalists and intelligence agencies to decide what to do with troves of leaked documents.</p> <p>“Successful hacking and exfiltration is often the easy part,” said Wilde. “Making sense of mountains of unstructured data is an entirely different ballgame — these collectives seem content to simply pass that burden onto anyone else.”</p>

Regardless of their effect, hack-and-leak operations are a central component of this cyberwar. “These cyberattacks draw out actors driven by everything from pure ego to sincere patriotism, who might have otherwise been reluctant to engage in hacktivism,” Wilde said.

Some of these data leaks can be valuable for journalists or intelligence services down the road.

“Not all of the data is immediately helpful, but it adds to the huge repository of data that already exists in Russia, linking together addresses, names, and phone numbers,” Toler said.

Angry hackers

For many Ukrainian tech specialists, hacking Russia is an emotional thing — they do it out of anger or despair when other ways to fight the enemy are not available.

When Russia launched a massive missile attack on Ukrainian cities on New Year’s Eve, Ukrainian hackers wrote on Telegram that they would attack Russian digital infrastructure in response.

The most common types of cyberattacks among Ukrainian hackers and hacktivists are distributed denial-of-service, defacements, and data leaks — these attacks don’t require as much skill as more destructive operations, several cybersecurity experts said.

Despite the lack of noticeable influence, hacktivists’ attacks can annoy the Russian government. The Kremlin said in December that it intends to impose fines of up to \$7 million on companies affected by data breaches, as well as develop a system that will detect leaked data published on Telegram.

In 2022, hackers leaked more than 1.5 billion lines of personal data of Russian citizens, according to Moscow-based cybersecurity company Kaspersky Lab.

Instead of selling the leaked data on darknet forums, pro-Ukrainian hackers publish it in Telegram channels, such as NLB, DumpForums, or Dataleaks. The most common response from the Russian government to these leaks is to dismiss them – claiming they contain outdated information or data that was already in the public domain.

This is not always true. For example, after hackers from the pro-Ukrainian group NLB published 17 million lines of data leaked from Moscow’s e-schooling service earlier in December, the Russian government denied that the database contained data of real users. However, BBC Russia wrote that its reporters looked through the database and found information about their own children inside.

Legitimate targets

The data of Russian schoolchildren is unlikely to help Ukraine win the war, but pro-Ukrainian hackers told The Record that when it comes to Russia, all their targets are “legitimate.”

“Why are the Russians’ data hacked? This is because their compatriots came to Ukraine to kill and steal,” Townsend, from the Ukrainian Cyber Alliance, wrote on Telegram. “Anything ending in .ru is a legitimate target.”

A hacktivist group from Belarus called the Cyber Partisans also follows this rule when they pass on Russian data to journalists.

“Russia provoked a war that is supported by the majority of the population, so from a moral point of view, we are not worried about the privacy of the data of Russian citizens,” the group’s spokesperson Yuliana Shemetovets told The Record.

When Cyber Partisans leaks the data of Belarusian citizens, they are more careful. “We do not share highly sensitive information, such as passport data of Belarusians, with journalists. Even most Cyber Partisans do not have access to this information,” Shemetovets said.

And while government and intelligence services are a priority for hackers, sometimes the information they get from civilian companies also turns out to be useful.

For example, among the many users affected by a data leak from Yandex Food, a popular food delivery service in Russia, are agents of Russia's security services and military, who in several cases ordered food to their workplaces using their official email addresses, according to Bellingcat.

To verify the authenticity of this leak, Bellingcat cross-referenced data points to independent sources including social media profiles and other leaked databases. Bellingcat's staff and contributors in more than 20 countries use publicly-available data, social media posts, and leaked documents to investigate a variety of subjects – war crimes, human rights abuses, and organized crime. One of its high-profile investigations helped to identify a key suspect in the Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 accident in 2014.

“A successful data leak is not about hacking one big target, it is about the amount of data obtained,” Townsend told The Record. “With a lot of data, you can find anyone.”

Ukraine's government uses data obtained from hackers to assemble the so-called “Book of Executioners,” listing Russian soldiers who kill and allegedly torture Ukrainians. Ukraine-based OSINT company Molfar cooperates with hackers to obtain leaked Russian databases, such as those of FSB employees, which it then verifies and sends to journalists.

Analyzing data

When hackers leak data, they rarely care what happens to it next.

“My main task is to gather data and give it to those who know what to do with it,” said Yaroslav Garaguts, founder of the Clarity Project open database. Leaked data is usually used by journalists to conduct investigations or law enforcement agencies to identify suspects, he said.

According to Shemetovets from Cyber Partisans, hacktivists don't have the time or resources to investigate all the data, so they give it to journalists they trust.

“Hacking large databases is a big responsibility,” she said. “This data should be protected by the government, but it fell on the shoulders of Cyber Partisans. We were just lucky that it got into the hands of people with the right values.”

Not all hackers can handle leaked data responsibly. With large data dumps, hackers usually have “a very loose idea of what is in there due to the sheer amount of data (hundreds of gigabytes, at times), along with a possible lack of language and cultural understanding of the content,” Toler said.

Some leaks, on the other hand, are over-curated. “You have to be really careful about verification and considering what the objective of the leakers may be,” Toler told The Record.

Verification of leaked data is a laborious process, according to him. It's not really possible for the giant-mega-ultra dumps of information to be entirely fabricated, but it is possible to sneak a fake bit of data into it.

Destructive attacks

The fact that both Russian and Ukrainian hacktivists are mostly involved in DDoS, defacement, and hack-and-leak operations suggests the limits of both their capabilities and risk tolerance, according to Wilde. “More sophisticated offensive cyber operations are hard to pull off and might draw too much of the wrong kind of attention,” he said.

Some experts believe that these operations are only the tip of the iceberg and that hackers simply do not talk about more serious cyberattacks.

	<p>The transition from espionage and data leaks to destructive attacks requires time and sufficient skills, according to Townsend.</p> <p>“There are many hackers behind Ukraine and they will become more organized and move on to more serious operations that will cause more damage to the Russian IT infrastructure. But this is a slow process,” he said.</p>
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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	01/11 Combatting cyberterrorism
SOURCE	https://www.geospatialworld.net/prime/special-features/combating-cyberterrorism-via-spatial-data-insights/
GIST	<p>Social media has emerged as a new turf of terrorist groups and organized crime syndicates. In this scenario, data-based insights and geospatial visualizations play a key role in tracking these activities.</p> <p>While social media has enhanced connectivity and is a rich source of diverse information, at the same time, it poses several threats, ranging from impersonations, and identity thefts to cyber terrorism, and racketeering. The dark underbelly of the internet is a hotbed of all sorts of illicit activities that often tend to escape the lens of regulatory agencies.</p> <p>As per estimates, cyber-attacks have spiked by up to 240% since the second half of 2021.</p> <p>According to the Cybersecurity Ventures report, the estimated cost of cyber crimes would reach up to \$10.5 trillion annually by 2025, representing one of the greatest wealth transfers in history.</p> <p>Had cybercrime been a country, it would have been the third largest economy in the world, after China and the USA, as Cybercrime Magazine forecasts.</p> <p>How Do Extremist Groups Use Social Media?</p> <p>Along with disinformation and fraud, the use of social media for terrorist propaganda, recruitment, and funnelling funds, is a big global threat. Counter-terrorism agencies globally are increasingly monitoring social media platforms to prevent these.</p> <p>As per a study by Gabriel Weimann from the University of Haifa in 2012, nearly 90% of organized terrorist activities on the internet take place via social media.</p> <p>“Terrorist groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah have long used social media for a variety of purposes: training, recruitment, planning. Groups such as ISIS have used video sharing sites to post training videos on how to carry out beheadings,” says Professor V.S. Subrahmanian, Walter P. Murphy Professor – Dept. of Computer Science & Buffett Faculty Fellow, Buffett Institute of Global Affairs, Head, Northwestern Security & AI Lab (NSAIL), Northwestern University.</p> <p>“Closed groups have been used to plot attacks, but in order to join such closed groups, potential new members typically need a reference from someone already in the group,” he adds.</p> <p>Lure of Online Networks</p> <p>Extremist activities are not only confined to social media but other online networks such as gaming platforms and video channels as well.</p> <p>There are over three billion gamers worldwide, out of which millions are active users on gaming and gaming-adjacent platforms. Considering the huge population, which mostly comprises teenagers, and adults aged between 20-35 years of age, who invest their leisure-time on gaming platforms, it has become a breeding ground for those with extremist ideologies. The attackers exploit the popularity of this space and accumulate the data about users for spreading propaganda, training and communication efforts.</p>

These online networks and platforms allow terror groups to engage with their target audience, whereas previously terror groups would release messages via intermediaries. Social media platforms allow terror groups to release messages directly to their intended audience and converse with their audience in real time through chat boxes.

Prof. Subrahmanian says that terrorist groups use social media to target people that they don't know. For a long time, ISIS was posting instructional videos on how to carry out beheadings. When those kinds of videos started getting increasingly detected and blocked quickly, they changed tact. They started posting videos on how to cut a melon instead, at some level, melon being like the human head.

"They've taken the problem and sort of mapped it onto an analogous. They've taken their problem of showing would-be terrorists how to carry out terrible beheadings to an analogous problem, where the would-be terrorists, they're expecting to follow them, are nonetheless trained, but in a domain that none of us could have anticipated, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube," he adds.

"Social media was now a "loss leader" for groups like Islamic State (IS)," Cyber terrorism experts Prof Maura Conway, from Dublin City and Swansea universities was quoted as saying.

"IS and the like still post on Facebook and Twitter etc., but they know that they'll quickly be removed, so they use a scattergun approach to entice the most number of people in the limited time their message will be seen," she added.

Geospatial for Intel Gathering

Terrorists gather all the vital information about the area through their local source and chalk out the plan and the pattern of attacks. This is why they target young people, especially from the marginalized community of the area, who are either in need of money or a job to carry out their organized crimes.

With the use of geospatial analytics, these activities can be identified and tracked. Demographic mapping and distribution can come in handy in spotting areas and populations most at risk.

Geospatial Information System (GIS) is used by defense authorities to identify cyber-crime and locate them on maps to track the criminals pre-emptively.

The US cyber-security firm, Mandiant, used geospatial technologies like social network analytics, intelligence and real-time event scoring to trace cyber-criminal activity in Shanghai, China in 2013.

Geospatial technologies are transforming from identifying traditional crimes and analyzing cyber activities to protecting valuable data and information of the country. It provides important information rich with intelligence analytics to make informed decisions.

Data Conundrum

With the vast availability of online data and the model of aggregation and monetization by third party companies, there is a risk of this data being used for psychological profiling, behavioral manipulation, and indoctrination by terror groups. However, data-based insights come to aid in tracking criminal activities.

"Ten years ago when I started crowdsourcing data on sexual and gender based violence most people did not understand what I was doing and how the dataset could be useful," says **ElsaMarie DSilva, Founder, Red Dot Foundation.**

"We are now actively mapping sexual and gender based violence in 17 countries besides India with partner organizations and it is interesting how they plan to use the data".

New Response Plan

The behavior and actions taken by social media companies over the last five years have significantly improved the landscape in terms of the ability of terrorist groups to carry out these kinds of things.

“Governments have primarily tried to combat terror groups’ social media presence through legislation and regulation. For instance, in the early days (2010- 2015), terrorist content on mainstream social platforms was quite extensive.

In examples where a group was posting about how to cut a melon, it was not immediately clear if the video was a terrorist video or not, leading to delays and complications in taking the videos offline. In recent years, most major social platforms have cells that are dedicated to taking down such content as soon as possible,” says Prof. Subrahmanian.

“We cannot blame the social media, the real people to blame are the bad guys. The social media companies do have to be put on notice that they need to invest sufficient resources and have a game plan to deal with this kind of thing, and that’s part of regulation,” he adds.

There’s a need for compliance guidelines that are unambiguously mentioned. “Just like the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) puts out cyber advisories, we need to put out social media advisories, and extensively monitor social media.” he concludes.

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HEADLINE	01/10 NCTC warns: don’t overlook AQ, IS threat
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/key-official-says-us-must-not-overlook-al-qaida-islamic-state/6913250.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — For months the gaze of U.S. counterterrorism officials has been shifting, moving from scrutiny of foreign terrorist organizations to individuals in the United States seeking out ideologies to justify their use of violence.</p> <p>The most likely attackers, according to the government's most recent terrorism advisory, are lone actors or small groups motivated by a wide array of beliefs and personal grievances who pose a "persistent and lethal threat to the homeland."</p> <p>But while attacks like the May 2022 mass shooting that killed 10 Black shoppers in Buffalo, New York, continue to grab headlines and the attention of officials, the top U.S. counterterrorism official cautions that jihadi groups, such as al-Qaida and Islamic State, cannot be forgotten.</p> <p>"We have still got to be really vigilant about the threat posed by those organizations that are based overseas that want to conduct attacks against Americans here in the homeland," National Counterterrorism Center Director Christine Abizaid said Tuesday at an event hosted by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.</p> <p>"The al-Qaida- and ISIS-inspired threat is still there," she said, using an acronym for the Islamic State group, which is also known as IS or Daesh.</p> <p>Years of counterterrorism pressure by the U.S. and its partners have taken a toll on the two groups, whittling away each group's core leaders.</p> <p>Islamic State</p> <p>IS has been especially hard hit, losing two emirs over the past 12 months — Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi during a raid by U.S. special forces in northwest Syria last February and Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi during an independent operation by the Free Syrian Army this past October.</p> <p>In the months between those two deaths, the U.S. and its partner forces in Syria and Iraq, as well as allies like Turkey, killed or captured another 10 senior IS leaders.</p> <p>But the victories against IS appear to have done little to dampen overall enthusiasm for the group and its affiliates.</p>

"ISIS is actually a very dynamic group that continues to be led from this core in Iraq and Syria, continues to have interest in not just their sort of territorial integrity but in the notoriety and the brand expansion and attacks against the West," Abizaid said.

"We see ISIS's expansion across the African continent. We see concerning indications of ISIS-Khorasan in Afghanistan and its ambition that might go beyond that immediate territory," she added, calling the IS Afghan affiliate the "threat actor I am most concerned about," while declining to estimate how soon it could threaten interests outside Afghanistan.

Al-Qaida

Al-Qaida, too, has been dealt some severe blows, perhaps none so important as the death of longtime leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in a U.S. drone strike in Kabul in August.

"Zawahiri was the center of gravity for that network," Abizaid said. "He was both symbolically important but also strategically important for what was a diverse network of affiliates."

And according to the most recent U.S. intelligence estimates, more than six months after his death, al-Zawahiri has still not been replaced.

"The question for al-Qaida, that it hasn't answered for itself, is who follows," Abizaid said. "The best candidates are Saif al-Adel and Abdul Rahman al-Maghrebi, that are sitting in Iran ... What does that mean for their credibility? What does that mean for their ability to lead?"

U.S. intelligence also suggests other parts of the Afghanistan-based al-Qaida organization have been further marginalized, perhaps by design at the direction of the Taliban or the Haqqani network, with Abizaid saying the affiliate known as al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent, once thought to have a few hundred fighters in the country, is now "defunct."

She warned, however, it would be dangerous to write off al-Qaida just yet.

"The al-Qaida problem there is a problem," Abizaid said of Afghanistan.

Syria

There are also concerns about al-Qaida's remnants in Syria, most notably the faction known as Hurras al-Din, a group with 1,000 to 3,000 fighters whose leaders have been targeted by U.S. airstrikes in the past.

"Their stature, some of the interconnectivity with other aspects of the al-Qaida network, I think, are important and really resonant in the Hurras al-Din presence," according to Abizaid.

And she warned that the overall environment in Syria makes it a cauldron of potential terrorist activity poised to benefit al-Qaida, IS or eventually some other group.

"You have significant population of radicalized individuals in IDP [internally displaced person] camps, in prisons scattered throughout Syria, that represents the potential of a future threat if not appropriately engaged and handled," Abizaid said.

In addition to IS and al-Qaida, Abizaid said Iran and its proxies, active across the Middle East and even in Afghanistan, have become ever more open in their willingness to conduct terrorist attacks.

"I would describe Iran's interest in conducting terrorist attacks overseas as one of the most striking developments," the NCTC director said. "What I see is a pretty brazen Iranian threat network that is willing to explore avenues for attack internationally and in the region."

	<p>While some Iranian proxies, like Lebanese Hezbollah, have been increasingly vocal, Abizaid warned, "it's not just a proxy battle."</p> <p>"Iran is leveraging its own capability to threaten various actors," she said.</p> <p>"That we have actual evidence of them trying to pursue that interest inside the United States is a real concern," she said, noting the Iranian plot to kill former U.S. national security adviser Ambassador John Bolton.</p> <p>"The threats against Iranian activists and journalists here in the United States are also persistent and concerning," Abizaid said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Vegas attack suspect: for the greater good
SOURCE	https://www.reviewjournal.com/crime/courts/terrorism-suspect-told-police-he-damaged-power-facility-for-greater-good-2709775/
GIST	<p>A terrorism suspect told Las Vegas police that he was not trying to sabotage the power facility when he set a car on fire last week at the MGM Mega Solar Array.</p> <p>Mohammed Mesmarian "admitted he knew setting a vehicle on fire could cause damage to the unit, but stated he did it for the big message, larger picture, greater good," an officer wrote in an arrest report released Tuesday afternoon. "He explained the greater good was clean energy."</p> <p>Earlier Tuesday, a Las Vegas judge ordered a competency evaluation for the 34-year-old suspect after he was removed from a courtroom for twice interrupting another defendant's hearing.</p> <p>According to the heavily redacted arrest report, Mesmarian broke into the facility on the 10500 block of U.S. Highway 93, 30 miles northeast of Las Vegas, by crashing a maroon Toyota Camry through a fence at 3:57 p.m. on Jan. 3. He then spent the next few hours taking photos, turning off part of the "transfer switch," and driving his car closer to the transformer in the facility's control room.</p> <p>Mesmarian set the car on fire about 10 minutes after midnight and spent nearly 20 minutes sitting in a chair watching the flames before leaving the property, the report said.</p> <p>Although employees arrived at the facility at about 6 a.m. on Jan. 4, they did not discover the burnt vehicle until nearly 11:30 a.m., the report said.</p> <p>Mesmarian told police he had been in Las Vegas for about five days and had spent some time working on the Toyota, which belonged to his grandmother.</p> <p>"Mesmarian made comments he was born in Iran, works odd jobs and was in town with his mother," the report said.</p> <p>He said he burned the vehicle "because it uses gasoline and oil as well as produces carbon emissions." Destroying the vehicle was to send messages that the car "reminded him of harmful memories," and "to let go of the old forms of energy which were represented by the burning vehicle," the report said.</p> <p>About seven hours before the car crashed through the facility fence, employees caught Mesmarian trespassing at a Republic Services landfill near U.S. Highway 93 and Interstate 15, less than 7 miles from the solar array. Police were called to the landfill and spoke with Mesmarian, but it was unclear if he was detained.</p> <p>The MGM Solar Array is a collection of 323,000 panels arranged across 640 acres, which produces up to 90 percent of MGM Resorts' Las Vegas daytime power needs across 13 properties. The solar array is the hospitality industry's largest directly sourced renewable electricity project worldwide.</p>

Although the extent of the damage is unclear, an employee told police that the entire facility would have to be shut down until an inspection is complete, which could take several weeks, the report said.

Chicago-based array owner and operator Invenergy has said the facility is expected to be fully operational this week.

Courtroom interruptions

During Tuesday's court hearing, Mesmarian raised his hand and asked if he could speak before he stood up and started talking.

"There's so much wrong in the whole system since I entered here," Mesmarian told Las Vegas Justice of the Peace Nadia Wood before officers led him out of the room. "There's just a bunch of Black people stuck in a room together."

When Mesmarian was brought back into the courtroom, Wood said the defendant's attorney had requested that he undergo a competency evaluation.

Mesmarian answered "OK" when the judge told him he was being ordered to undergo the evaluation. As he was led out of the room, Mesmarian interrupted the proceedings again.

"What are we doing about changing things?" Mesmarian said, laughing.

His defense attorney, Nicholas Pitaro, declined to comment on the case following the hearing.

After Mesmarian's iPhone was found in the back seat of the burnt vehicle, he was arrested Thursday at the Boulder Beach campground in the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, police said.

It is unclear how Mesmarian got to the campground from the power facility. The arrest report indicated only that investigators located him using "advanced investigative techniques."

Mesmarian was found in a travel trailer with an Idaho license plate, the report said. Inside a Dodge Ram pickup truck at the campsite, police found multiple firearms and a notebook with the word "solar" written on the first page.

The suspect tried to run from police while at the campsite, while being taken into an interview room at Metropolitan Police Department headquarters, and while being taken to the Clark County Detention Center, the report said.

When asked why he tried to escape, Mesmarian said he "wanted to experience the feeling of what Black Lives Matter (BLM) protestors felt when they were tazed by the police."

Other attacks

Mesmarian faces charges of committing an act of terrorism, escape by a prisoner, and two counts each of arson and destruction of property valued at \$5,000 or more, court records show.

The FBI is helping Las Vegas police investigate the attack. Nationwide, the number of attacks on power grid facilities increased in 2022, and more recent attacks on substations on Christmas Day knocked out power in five states.

An officer wrote in the arrest report that recent attacks across the U.S. have coincided with "propaganda circulating online ... to attack critical infrastructure, including power grids." Investigators believe that a recent attack in Moore County, North Carolina, was motivated by an online document that listed specific facilities to target, including several locations in the Las Vegas Valley, the report said.

The officer who authored the report noted that Mesmarian's "true motivations" are unknown.

	<p>“At this point in the investigation it’s too early to rule anything out,” Chief Deputy District Attorney Michael Dickerson told the Las Vegas Review-Journal on Tuesday. “But I can say that we don’t currently have any information that directly connects him to any of those other attacks.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Succession after AQ leader’s death unclear
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/al-qaeda-succession-after-al-zawahiris-death-still-unclear-us-official-2023-01-10/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON, Jan 10 (Reuters) - The succession of Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was believed to have been killed in a U.S. raid last year, remains unclear, a U.S. intelligence official said on Tuesday.</p> <p>Zawahiri was killed in a U.S. strike in Afghanistan, the biggest blow to the militant group since its founder Osama bin Laden was killed in 2011.</p> <p>"The question for Al Qaeda, that it has not answered for itself, is who follows (Zawahiri)," Christine Abizaid, director of the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, said in an event organized by the Washington Institute when asked about Al Qaeda's "center of gravity" after Zawahiri's death.</p> <p>Zawahiri had been in hiding for years. Al Qaeda has not named a successor.</p> <p>Saif al-Adel, a mysterious, low-key former Egyptian special forces officer who is a high-ranking member of Al Qaeda, is seen by experts as the top contender. The United States is offering a reward of up to \$10 million for information leading to his arrest.</p> <p>Abizaid also addressed the threat landscape in the United States and said the country faced an "unpredictable" environment, adding that Americans must remain vigilant about overseas-based extremist organizations such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State.</p> <p>"The online environment is where most of the radicalisation is occurring," she said.</p> <p>Lone actors remained a key threat for the United States, Abizaid said, adding they could be inspired by overseas extremist groups or be driven by racially and ethnically motivated violent domestic extremism.</p> <p>Her remarks echoed a recent assessment by the Department of Homeland Security, which said in November that the U.S. threat environment will remain heightened in the coming months, with lone offenders and groups motivated by a range of ideologies posing a danger.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Feds charge suspect ‘jihadi-inspired’ attack
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/10/nyregion/trevor-bickford-federal-terror-charges.html
GIST	<p>Federal prosecutors filed charges on Tuesday against a 19-year-old Maine man whom the authorities have portrayed as carrying out a “jihad-inspired” terrorist attack on three New York City police officers near Times Square on New Year’s Eve.</p> <p>State prosecutors said last week that the man, Trevor Bickford, had told investigators after he was arrested in the attack on the officers that he had come to New York to “kill people and carry out jihad.” On Tuesday, federal prosecutors said that Mr. Bickford had planned the assault and that investigators had interviewed him weeks before it occurred.</p> <p>In announcing the charges, Damian Williams, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, said in a statement that Mr. Bickford had targeted the New Year’s Eve celebration in “a brazen act of violence and hatred in the name of jihad.” Christopher A. Wray, the F.B.I. director, called the assault on the officers “a jihad-inspired attack.”</p>

Mr. Bickford, who was previously charged by the Manhattan district attorney's office with first-degree attempted murder, attempted assault and state terrorism counts, now faces four federal counts of attempted murder.

The attack occurred just after 10 p.m. on Dec. 31 at 52nd Street and Eighth Avenue, where a group of officers were stationed as the annual revelry neared its peak.

Approaching the officers, Mr. Bickford said, "Allahu akbar" — Arabic for "God is great" — before hitting one over the head with a long knife known as a kukri, according to court documents. The blow fractured the officer's skull, the police said.

Mr. Bickford then charged at another officer, dropping the knife as he did and trying to grab the officer's gun, according to court documents. The police said a third officer shot Mr. Bickford in the shoulder before he was taken into custody, where he remains.

The F.B.I. began to investigate Mr. Bickford in mid-December, in part based on concerns raised by members of his family about his behavior, according to a criminal complaint filed on Tuesday in Federal District Court in Manhattan.

The family members said he had recently converted to Islam, had begun to visit mosques in and around Maine and New Hampshire, had started to research the Taliban and had shown interest in traveling to Afghanistan to join the group, according to the complaint.

He also bought a crossbow that he planned to take with him and felt obligated by the Islamic religion to practice using the weapon every day, the complaint says.

Late last year, the complaint says, Mr. Bickford told family members that he wanted to travel to Jordan or Afghanistan to become a suicide bomber for his religion. He bought a ticket to Jordan but did not board the flight, according to the complaint.

In mid-December, after scrapping the Jordan trip, Mr. Bickford agreed to be interviewed by the F.B.I., according to the complaint. He said in the interview that he had begun to read the Quran and attend mosques and had started to follow imams on YouTube, the complaint says.

He also said he had bought tickets several weeks earlier to fly to India and had planned to travel from there to Afghanistan, the complaint says.

Once in Afghanistan, he told the F.B.I., he hoped to "ally" himself with the Taliban and to persuade them to help him fight the oppression of Muslims in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, the complaint says.

Mr. Bickford canceled the Afghanistan trip in order to see his brother, a U.S. soldier who was coming to visit him, according to the complaint.

Mr. Bickford claimed in the interview that he did not agree with the Taliban's use of violence against civilians and that he did not intend to join Al Qaeda, the complaint says.

The federal defenders office, which is representing Mr. Bickford in the federal case, declined to comment Tuesday night. The Legal Aid Society, which represented him in state court, said last week that he had no criminal record and cautioned against a rush to judge him.

An aunt of Mr. Bickford's told The New York Times last week that she does not believe he is a terrorist.

"I want that label off of him," the aunt, Muriella D'Antilio, said in an interview. Instead, she said, he was depressed and had struggled because of a turbulent home life that included his father's overdose death in 2018.

	<p>On the day of the attack, prosecutors said, Mr. Bickford wrote in his journal that “this will likely be my last entry” and that he believed his brother, the soldier, had “joined the ranks of my enemy.”</p> <p>In an interview with investigators after the attack, Mr. Bickford said he had recited verses from the Quran in his head to “hype himself up” for his assault. He said he believed he had failed because he did not kill any officers and had not died himself, the complaint says.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Rising number of attacks on WA power grid
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article270731657.html
GIST	<p>The number of confirmed or suspected attacks affecting the power grid in Washington state had reached a decade-high last year, even before four electrical substations in Pierce County were vandalized on Christmas Day.</p> <p>There were a dozen such cases in the state reported to the Department of Energy through Aug. 31, according to a News Tribune analysis of the most recently available data.</p> <p>It was the most the state had seen in a year since 2012, when 23 confirmed or suspected attacks were reported. There were 29 logged in 2011. The vast majority over that two-year period stemmed from Pierce County, the data showed.</p> <p>Until last year, annual cases reported in Washington to the DOE lingered in single digits and climbed no higher than eight, which was reached in 2019 and repeated in two successive years, according to the data.</p> <p>The rise in confirmed or suspected attacks in the state comes as incidents have increased across the nation amid warnings from federal authorities about threats to power grid security.</p> <p>Experts interviewed for this story did not want to speculate on what could be behind the uptick, but attacks in Washington, Oregon and North Carolina in recent months have pushed grid security to the forefront of the news cycle.</p> <p>“I think every one of those incidents is a wake-up call,” said Daniel Kirschen, a University of Washington professor in the Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering.</p> <p>The DOE collects data from the power industry, including utilities, which must submit an Electric Emergency Incident and Disturbance Report following instances of a physical or cyber attack, suspicious activity or other events to its systems, including those related to weather or malfunctions.</p> <p>The News Tribune reviewed annual reports over the past decade-plus and homed in on event types categorized as “vandalism,” “actual physical attack,” “suspected physical attack,” “suspicious activity” and “sabotage,” among others that indicated human involvement.</p> <p>The data through eight months of 2022 in Washington showed nine instances of a physical attack or vandalism, two instances of suspicious activity and a “cyber event.”</p> <p>In three instances, a reported activity spanned multiple western states, including a July 5 physical attack affecting Pierce County. The data indicated that the matter was quickly resolved and no customers were affected.</p> <p>HARD TO KEEP SAFE</p> <p>There were 108 confirmed or suspected attacks logged across the United States last year through Aug. 31, the most for any single year since 123 were reported in 2011, according to the data.</p> <p>Kirschen, whose expertise includes power system security and the electricity grid, said the massive breadth of the interconnected system across the nation made it difficult to protect. The grid maintains</p>

roughly 7,000 power plants, millions of miles of power lines and distribution transformers, and 55,000 transmission substations, according to 2016 and 2017 federal data.

“You can’t build enormous walls around all of those substations,” Kirschen said. “So it’s not an easy problem (to solve).”

Federal data shows that Washington is among states particularly at risk for malicious activities to the grid. More confirmed or suspected attacks have been reported in the western United States than anywhere else in the nation since 2011.

Again, experts were unsure of why.

The Western Electricity Coordinating Council, one of six major regional entities of the nonprofit North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), has seen 443 of 952, or 46%, of total reported cases between 2011 and August, according to The News Tribune’s analysis. The WECC region includes Washington, 10 other western states and western Canada.

“I think the threats are continuing to evolve, but we do have robust plans in place for each of those types of events that enable utilities more often than not to respond quickly and effectively,” said Adrienne Lotto, the senior vice president of Grid Security, Technical & Operations Services for the American Public Power Association.

Lotto added that oftentimes, there is no effect on utility customers.

“I think that’s important to note,” she said. “But I also think it’s equally important to note that the utilities do take it seriously.”

INCREASED SECURITY MEASURES

After the attacks in Pierce County, the two targeted companies — Tacoma Public Utilities and Puget Sound Energy — assured that security was of utmost importance. TPU spokesperson Rebekah Anderson said the company had increased security measures amid warnings from federal authorities and, again, following the vandalism at its two substations.

The American Public Power Association, which represents about 1,400 public power utilities, including TPU, pushed out a version of its physical security guide to members last year and will send an updated copy later in 2023, according to Lotto.

She said the industry is collaborative on sharing resources to fight risks.

Meanwhile, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, an independent agency which regulates electric transmission in the United States, has directed NERC to review the current physical security requirements for the grid in the wake of recent attacks, Lotto said.

Michael Mabee is an Army veteran whose research on electric grid disturbances and DOE data since 2011 has been cited on NPR, CBS News and 60 Minutes. Mabee cautioned that the DOE’s data was poorly kept and deficient in updating incident impacts to customers, thus making it difficult to analyze.

He questioned whether there would be any progress in better safeguarding the grid.

“This physical security problem, we’ve known about it for decades,” he said. “We’ve failed to fix it.”

Mabee said the surest path forward was pressuring Congress to ensure that physical security requirements were not lacking for the majority of grid assets, which he claimed was currently the case.

DESPERATION OR AN ACT OF TERRORISM?

The Associated Press reported on a Department of Homeland Security bulletin issued a year ago that warned of domestic terrorists with “a range of ideologies” threatening to attack the grid since at least 2020. Federal authorities also cautioned that extremist groups who seek to engage in mass violence to collapse society could be targeting the grid. The AP noted that white supremacist and anti-government groups have been linked to plotting attacks.

On Jan. 3, the Department of Justice announced that two Puyallup men were arrested for allegedly vandalizing the Pierce County substations, following a “fast-moving investigation by the FBI.” The vandalism caused at least \$3 million in damages, authorities said. The two targeted utility companies said the incidents damaged equipment and knocked out power for roughly 30,000 customers, including in Graham and Elk Plain.

Matthew Greenwood, 32, and Jeremy Crahan, 40, were charged with conspiracy to damage energy facilities and possession of an unregistered firearm, according to the DOJ. An unsealed criminal complaint revealed that one suspect reportedly told authorities that the attacks were intended to aid a burglary at a nearby business.

Greenwood and Crahan allegedly broke into a local business affected by the subsequent outage and stole the cash register, the charging document shows. On Friday, Greenwood’s girlfriend told The News Tribune that the couple were “desperate to get on our feet” and care for their baby.

Assistant U.S. attorney Stephen Hobbs had described the men’s alleged actions as “a crime of terrorism.”

For Mabee, the attack illustrated the susceptibility of the power infrastructure, regardless of the perpetrator’s motives.

“It takes relatively no sophistication to do a coordinated attack against the U.S. electric system,” he said.

VANDALISM OFTEN CITED, BUT OUTAGES RARE

Since 2011, there have been at least 112 confirmed or suspected attacks affecting the power grid in Washington, according to federal data, excluding activity during the last four months of 2022. In the majority of instances, there was no reported effect on customers or the impact was unknown.

At least 57 of those incidents have hit Pierce County — a figure buoyed by the large number of cases in 2011 and 2012, federal data showed. Since then, the county has been affected by nine incidents through Aug. 31, including the one in July.

That figure could be higher because the data in some instances associates an incident with “Washington” but does not specify the affected area within the state.

The federal data does not include the vandalism at four substations last month.

Those attacks on Christmas Day, if grouped together, interrupted power for more customers in the state than any other reported attack since at least 2011 in instances where the impact was reported, according to federal data.

“We have seen attacks such as these increase in Western Washington and throughout the country and must treat each incident seriously,” U.S. Attorney Nick Brown said in a statement Jan. 3.

Reported power disruptions from vandalism and theft are uncommon in the state. There were eight such incidents in Washington between 2008 and 2017 that resulted in a power outage, according to a state energy sector risk profile produced by the DOE in 2021.

But vandalism to the power grid has been the most frequently reported type of confirmed or suspected attack affecting the power grid in Washington since 2011.

There have been at least 67 vandalism incidents in the state over the last decade-plus, as well as 24 suspected physical attacks that were unspecified and nine reports of suspicious activity, the data showed. Only two incidents were described as related to cybersecurity.

TPU suffered two other incidents of vandalism last year, according to spokesperson Jessica Wilson. Both were after Aug. 31, and thus would not yet be included in federal data. One instance occurred in the Elk Plain area on Oct. 3 and another in South Tacoma on Nov. 29, according to Wilson.

The utility also saw dozens of unplanned outages attributed to human involvement in 2022 that it did not classify as intentional or unintentional, she said.

They included 61 car crashes that involved a power line, seven cases of tree branches falling on lines, six cases of balloons being caught in lines, two cases of people digging into buried lines, and 14 incidents that covered “other” events, such as brush fires or human error.

Wilson did not have any details on whether any of those incidents led to investigations into potential criminal activity and she deferred to law enforcement.

The federal data also does not provide information about the potential criminal aspects of incidents reported to the DOE, including whether they resulted in arrests or charges. But to experts, each one is alarming.

“If these attacks multiply,” Kirschen said, “this could be really terrible.”

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HEADLINE	01/10 No bail: suspects in substations attack
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article271018517.html
GIST	<p>A second man accused of attacking four Pierce County substations and knocking out power for thousands on Christmas Day was ordered held without bail by a U.S. District Court judge in Tacoma on Tuesday pending a grand jury indictment.</p> <p>Federal pretrial services officials and the defense attorney for 40-year-old Jeremy Crahan recommended that he be released to his parents’ Pierce County residence on GPS monitoring, but Chief Magistrate Judge Richard Creatura disagreed. Creatura cited the danger of the power outages and prosecutors’ allegations Crahan was planning another attack with co-defendant Matthew Greenwood, 32, in the days that followed.</p> <p>Federal law enforcement used electronic location data to put Crahan’s and Greenwood’s cell phones at the scenes of all four attacks — the only devices that was true for, according to court documents and testimony. Additionally, Crahan’s truck matched a vehicle captured on surveillance footage.</p> <p>“The weight of the evidence is pretty significant here,” Creatura said. Investigators have not uncovered evidence the Pierce County attacks were politically motivated, and attorneys have relied upon Greenwood’s admission to the FBI that the outages were cover for burglaries of local businesses.</p> <p>Assistant U.S. attorney Todd Greenberg said search warrants for the suspects’ phones were pending.</p> <p>“It’s astounding to think of the level of poor judgment and recklessness,” Greenberg said of the Christmas Day attacks that knocked out power for an estimated 15,000 Puget Sound Energy and Tacoma Power customers and caused millions of dollars in damage.</p> <p>Federal public defenders were assigned to represent the defendants based on financial disclosures. Lance Hester of Tacoma-based Hester Law Group is representing Crahan because the Office of the Federal Public Defender can’t represent two co-defendants.</p> <p>Crahan shook his head when Creatura and Greenberg mentioned him planning a follow-up attack and suggested he might commit crimes if released on GPS monitoring. He watched attentively as the attorneys</p>

spoke and attempted to address Creatura directly as the hearing concluded. Hester stopped him from grabbing the microphone.

Crahan's criminal history includes 12 felony convictions since 2005, the most recent being a 2016 conviction in a residential burglary case. Greenberg said Crahan was still under state supervision from a 2014 conviction at the time. Greenberg said Crahan also had active arrest warrants during the substation attacks.

Hester said Crahan doesn't have a history of violence and no longer has issues with drug use, which had a factor in his past criminal activity.

"He is proud to have that dependency behind him," Hester said while arguing for his release.

Greenwood told the FBI that he and Crahan got the idea to knock out power to cover up burglaries from TV news coverage of recent attacks on electrical infrastructure. Federal law enforcement has raised concerns about domestic extremists, such as white supremacist and anti-government groups, targeting energy facilities, according to the Associated Press.

Before the Christmas Day outages, the number of confirmed or suspected attacks on the Washington power grid had reached a decade-high last year, according to an analysis by The News Tribune.

Creatura also ordered Greenwood held without bail on Friday. Greenwood's defense attorney argued for his release on GPS monitoring to an inpatient drug treatment facility, which federal pretrial services also recommended due to methamphetamine addiction.

Each of the defendants had to overcome a presumption under federal law that they should remain in custody on a charge of conspiracy to damage energy facilities, which is considered a crime of terrorism and carries a penalty of up to 20 years in prison.

Greenwood also faces up to 10 years on a possessing unregistered firearms offense. Greenwood's girlfriend told The News Tribune that the men met each other through her, calling Crahan an older brother figure. She said Greenwood was desperate to come up with money to care for the baby she's expected to deliver in a few weeks.

Both defendants waived a preliminary hearing where Creatura would have ruled whether there was probable cause to proceed to trial. Their attorneys and federal prosecutors asked to extend the deadline for a grand jury indictment to March 16 due to ongoing investigations of the attacks.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Spain repatriates IS families in Syria camps
SOURCE	https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230110-spain-repatriates-2-women-13-children-from-syria-camps?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=5898014
GIST	<p>Madrid (AFP) – Madrid has repatriated two Spanish women who were married to Islamic State group fighters, flying them home from jihadist camps in Syria with 13 children, the government said on Tuesday.</p> <p>They arrived at Torrejon de Ardoz military airport near Madrid late on Monday, nearly two months after the Spanish government agreed to bring them home.</p> <p>"The government has just repatriated two women and 13 Spanish minors from Syrian refugee camps," a foreign ministry statement said.</p> <p>The two women were arrested on arrival and would be brought before a judge at the Audiencia Nacional, Spain's top criminal court, it said.</p>

A court spokesman confirmed the women would appear in court on Wednesday morning on "terrorism-related charges".

The 13 children were taken into the care of the Madrid region's social services, it said.

The ministry said the extradition had taken "several months" because of the "complexity (of the operation) and due to the high-risk situation in the Syrian camps".

El Mundo newspaper said the pair arrived with their nine children, aged between three and 15, with El Pais daily saying the other four were orphans who were being looked after by one of the women.

Over the past decade, thousands of extremists in Europe travelled to Syria to become fighters with the Islamic State group (IS), often taking their wives and children to live in the "caliphate" it set up in territory seized in Iraq and Syria.

Since the so-called "caliphate" fell in 2019, the return of family members of fighters who were either captured or killed has been a thorny issue for European countries.

Third woman 'missing'

One of the women who returned is reportedly married to an IS fighter who is currently jailed in Syria, while the other is widowed.

The women will face charges of cooperating with a terror organisation for allegedly helping IS. If convicted, they face up to five years behind bars.

Spain had in November agreed to repatriate three women, but the third woman -- whom El Mundo said was a teacher from Ceuta, one of Spain's two enclaves in North Africa -- could not be located, the paper said.

The women had been held in various detention camps in Syria since 2019.

They have claimed they were tricked by their husbands into going to Syria and did not participate in any jihadist activities, El Pais newspaper reported in November.

Spain also agreed to repatriate a Moroccan woman who was married to a Spanish fighter who died, along with her three children, but the family fled a detention camp near Iraq in 2020 and their whereabouts are unknown.

Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands have also repatriated relatives of jihadist fighters.

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HEADLINE	01/10 US, Russia clash: violent extremism Africa
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-russia-clash-violent-extremism-africa-96346659
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS -- The United States accused Russian military contractors backed by the Kremlin on Tuesday of interfering in the internal affairs of African countries and "increasing the likelihood that violent extremism will grow" in the Sahel region which is facing increasing attacks and deteriorating security -- an allegation Russia denied.</p> <p>U.S. deputy ambassador Richard Mills lashed out at the Wagner Group at a U.N. Security Council meeting on West Africa and the Sahel, accusing its paramilitary forces of failing to address the extremist threat, robbing countries of their resources, committing human rights abuses, and endangering the safety and security of U.N. peacekeepers and staff.</p> <p>France's political counselor Isis Jaraud-Darnault echoed Mills, saying "the model" used by Wagner mercenaries has proven "totally ineffective in combating terrorism." He cited the "nefarious" and</p>

devastating impact of its work and human rights violations, including the alleged killing of over 30 civilians in Mali, and its pillaging of natural resources.

Britain's deputy U.N. ambassador James Kariuki cited the deterioration of security especially in Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin, and the fear of instability spreading to West African coastal countries. "You cannot ignore the destabilizing role the Wagner Group plays in the region. They are part of the problem, not the solution," he told the council.

Russia's deputy U.N. ambassador Anna Evstigneeva rejected attempts "to besmirch Russian assistance to Mali," where Moscow has a bilateral agreement to assist the transitional government, "and in other countries in Africa."

"Some countries once again today declared that Russia apparently is pillaging and looting the resources of Africa and is facilitating the growth of the terrorist threat," she said, accusing those unnamed nations of doing the same thing "throughout the world and in Africa" especially in neighboring Libya which destabilized the entire area.

"Accusations against Russia are just astonishing, given common sense," and undermine African leaders trying to resolve their own problems and decide who they want to cooperate with, she said.

Evstigneeva never mentioned the Wagner Group by name. The group is run by a confidant of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and its mercenaries are accused by Western countries and U.N. experts of numerous human rights abuses throughout Africa, including in the Central African Republic, Libya and Mali.

Giovanie Biha, the deputy head of the U.N. Office for West Africa and the Sahel, told the council that "insecurity has again deteriorated in large parts of the region," due to activities of armed groups, violent extremists and criminal networks. As a result, she said, more than 10,000 schools across the Sahel have closed, leaving millions of children without an education, nearly 7,000 health centers have shut down.

Armed groups are fighting for supremacy and control of resources, she said, and the central Sahel is facing "unprecedented levels of security and humanitarian challenges, socio-political instability, further compounded by the impact of climate change, and food insecurity which was exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine." She added that increasing attacks in countries along the Gulf of Guinea are threatening transport arteries to landlocked countries further north.

According to Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' latest report issued this week, over 18.6 million people in the region are experiencing "severe food insecurity," an increase of 5.6 million since the end of June 2022, with Burkina Faso, the Niger and Nigeria being the hardest hit. And about 6.3 million people are displaced across the Sahel, an increase of 300,000 since June.

Russia's Evstigneeva said Moscow shares concerns about the increasing number of terrorist threats in the region, ongoing inter-ethnic and inter-communal conflict, organized crime, drug trafficking and killing of a large number of civilians by fighters in the second half of 2022.

She pointed to the withdrawal of French counterterrorism forces and the Takuba European military task force under their command on June 30, saying it wasn't agreed on with Mali's transitional government and is having "a negative impact" on the security situation in the short-term.

"Nonetheless," she said, "there is already some progress" and Russia is providing Mali with "appropriate assistance."

Mills, the U.S. deputy ambassador, said the United States is deeply concerned at the security, humanitarian and political crisis in the Sahel that are causing "a dramatic increase in the strength and influence of violent extremism."

	<p>The problem requires “a democratic governance solution,” he said. “We are also gravely concerned about democratic backsliding across the region and urge the return of democratically elected, civilian-led governments.”</p> <p>West Africa’s latest wave of coups kicked off in Mali in 2020, followed by another in Guinea in 2021, and then Burkina Faso in January 2022.</p> <p>Omar Alieu Touray, president of the West African regional group ECOWAS' commission, told the council he was pleased to report that transitions to critical elections in the three countries are “on course,” with voting to take place in the next two years.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Taliban bar Afghan women from sports
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/afghan-women-athletes-barred-play-fear-taliban-threats-96356021
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan -- Noura’s determination to play sports was so great that she defied her family’s opposition for years. Beatings from her mother and jeers from her neighbors never stopped her from the sports she loved.</p> <p>But the 20-year-old Afghan woman could not defy her country’s Taliban rulers. They have not just banned all sports for women and girls, they have actively intimidated and harassed those who once played, often scaring them from even practicing in private, Noura and other women say.</p> <p>Noura has been left shattered. “I’m not the same person anymore,” she said. “Since the Taliban came, I feel like I’m dead.”</p> <p>A number of girls and women who once played a variety of sports told The Associated Press they have been intimidated by the Taliban with visits and phone calls warning them not to engage in their sports. The women and girls spoke on condition of anonymity for fear they will face further threats.</p> <p>They posed for an AP photographer for portraits with the equipment of the sports they loved. They hid their identities with burqas, the all-encompassing robes and hood that completely cover the face, leaving only a mesh to see through. They didn't normally wear the burqa, but they said they sometimes do now when they go outside and want to remain anonymous and avoid harassment.</p> <p>The ban on sports is part of the Taliban's escalating campaign of restrictions that have shut down life for girls and women.</p> <p>Since their takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban have barred girls from attending middle and high school. Last month, they ordered all women thrown out of universities as well.</p> <p>The Taliban require women to cover their hair and faces in public and prohibit them from going to parks or gyms. They have severely limited women’s ability to work outside the home and most recently forbade non-governmental organizations from employing women, a step that could cripple the vital flow of aid.</p> <p>Even before the Taliban, women’s sports were opposed by many in Afghanistan’s deeply conservative society, seen as a violation of women’s modesty and of their role in society. Still, the previous, internationally-backed government had programs encouraging women's sports and school clubs, leagues and national teams for women in many sports.</p> <p>A 20-year-old mixed martial artist recalled how in August 2021, she was competing in a local women’s tournament at a Kabul sports hall. Word spread through the audience and participants that the advancing Taliban were on the city’s outskirts. All the women and girls fled the hall. It was the last competition the young athlete ever played in.</p>

Months later, she said she tried to give private lessons for girls. But Taliban fighters raided the gym where they were practicing and arrested them all. In detention, the girls were humiliated and mocked, she said. After mediation by elders, they were released after promising not to practice sports anymore.

She still practices at home and sometimes teaches her close friends.

“Life has become very difficult for me, but I am a fighter, so I will continue to live and fight,” she said.

Mushwanay, spokesman of the Taliban’s Sports Organization and National Olympic Committee, said authorities were looking for a way to restart sports for women by building separate sports venues. But he gave no time frame and said funds were needed to do so. Taliban authorities have repeatedly made similar promises to allow girls 7th grade and up to return to school, but still have not done so.

Noura faced resistance her whole life as she tried to play sports.

Raised in a poor Kabul district by parents who migrated from the provinces, Noura started out playing soccer alongside local boys in the street. When she was nine, a coach spotted her and, at his encouragement, she joined a girls’ youth team.

She kept it a secret from everyone but her father, but her cover was blown by her own talent. At 13, she was named the best girl soccer player in her age group, and her photo and name were broadcast on television.

“All over the world, when a girl becomes famous and her picture is shown on TV, it’s a good day for her and she’s at the peak of happiness,” she said. “For me, that day was very bitter and the beginning of worse days.”

Furious, her mother beat her, shouting that she was not allowed to play soccer. She kept playing in secret but was exposed again when her team won a national championship, and her photo was in the news. Again, her mother beat her.

Still, she sneaked off to the award ceremony. She broke down in tears on stage as the audience cheered. “Only I knew I was crying because of loneliness and the hard life I had,” she said.

When she found out, her mother set fire to her soccer uniform and shoes.

Noura gave up soccer, but then turned to boxing. Her mother eventually relented, realizing she couldn’t stop her from sports, she said.

The day the Taliban entered Kabul, she said, her coach called her mother and said Noura should go to the airport to be taken out of the country. Noura said her mother didn’t deliver the message because she didn’t want her to leave. When she learned of the message—too late to escape—Noura said she cut her wrists and had to be taken to the hospital.

“The world had become dark for me,” she said.

Three months later, someone who identified himself as a member of the Taliban called the family and threatened her. “They were saying, why did you play sports? Sports are forbidden,” she recalled.

Terrified, she left Kabul, disguising herself in her burqa to travel to her family’s hometown. Eventually, she returned but remains in fear.

“Even if my life was difficult, I used to have confidence in myself and knew that, with effort, I could do what I wanted,” she said. “Now I don’t have much hope anymore.”

Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/10 Classified intelligence files in Biden center
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/10/politics/biden-classified-documents-iran-ukraine-united-kingdom-beau-funeral/index.html
GIST	<p>Among the items from Joe Biden's time as vice president discovered in a private office last fall are 10 classified documents including US intelligence memos and briefing materials that covered topics including Ukraine, Iran and the United Kingdom, according to a source familiar with the matter.</p> <p>Attorney General Merrick Garland has received a preliminary report on the documents inquiry, a law enforcement source said, and now faces the critical decision on how to proceed, including whether to open a full-blown criminal investigation.</p> <p>John Lausch Jr., the US attorney in Chicago, has briefed Garland multiple times. No additional briefings are scheduled but would be conducted if necessary, a source said.</p> <p>The classified documents were dated between 2013 and 2016, according to the source familiar. They were found in three or four boxes also containing unclassified papers that fall under the Presidential Records Act.</p> <p>The vast majority of the items in the office contained personal Biden family documents, including materials about Beau Biden's funeral arrangements and condolence letters, the source told CNN. It is not clear if the boxes with classified documents contained personal materials.</p> <p>Attorney General Merrick Garland has assigned the US attorney in Chicago, a holdover from the Trump administration, to investigate the matter, CNN previously reported. Garland made this move after receiving a referral from the National Archives and Records Administration.</p> <p>The documents were discovered on November 2, just six days before the midterm elections, but the matter only became public Monday due to news reports.</p> <p>The source told CNN that a personal lawyer for Biden was closing out the downtown DC office that Biden used as part his work with the University of Pennsylvania. The lawyer saw a manila folder that was labeled "personal," opened the envelope and noticed there were classified documents inside. The lawyer closed the envelope and called NARA, the source said.</p> <p>After making contact with NARA, Biden's team turned over several boxes in an abundance of caution, even though many of the boxes contained personal materials, the source said.</p> <p>Biden said Tuesday that he did not know that some classified documents had been taken to his private office after he had left the vice presidency and that his attorneys "did what they should have done" by immediately calling the National Archives.</p> <p>"I was surprised to learn there were any government records that were taken there to that office," Biden said in response to a reporter's question at a news conference in Mexico City, where he was attending a trilateral summit with the leaders of Mexico and Canada.</p> <p>The documents, the president said, were found in "a box, locked cabinet – or at least a closet."</p> <p>"People know I take classified documents, classified information seriously," he said.</p> <p>US attorney has submitted preliminary findings to Garland</p> <p>Lausch has already completed the initial part of his inquiry and provided his preliminary findings to Garland, a law enforcement source said.</p>

That means Garland now must decide how to proceed. Garland was also personally involved in some of the key decision-making related to the Trump documents investigation and the decision to send the FBI to search Mar-a-Lago.

In the Trump matter, Garland tapped special counsel Jack Smith to take over both the criminal investigation into Trump's post-2020 election activities and the inquiry into classified documents the former president had taken to his Florida resort. The Biden probe is nowhere near that stage.

Garland chose to have Lausch conduct the Biden documents investigation because he is one of two remaining Trump-appointed US attorneys, and to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest because he wasn't appointed by Biden, people briefed on the matter said.

In addition to Garland, Lausch has also conducted additional briefings with other Justice Department officials.

At this point, the source said, Lausch is not expected to undertake additional "fact gathering."

In an awkward moment on Monday, Garland was sitting alongside Biden at a diplomatic summit in Mexico while reporters shouted questions about the probe. Both men ignored the questions.

Lausch was one of the rare Trump-era holdovers who wasn't told to resign after Biden's inauguration in 2021, and Illinois' two Democratic senators supported the decision to keep him at his post in part because he was handling the politically sensitive investigation of Michael Madigan, the former Democratic Illinois House speaker indicted on corruption charges.

The turn of events with classified documents found at Biden's former office has forced some politicians into a tough spot.

Trump has responded with a spate of social media posts lampooning Biden and publicly egging on the FBI to search Biden's offices and even the White House for mishandled documents.

Key Democrats on Capitol Hill have expressed confidence in Biden's handling of government materials, even though classified records turned up in a place where they weren't supposed to be.

Newly empowered House Republicans have already pledged to broaden their oversight probes to include the Biden documents matter, and some are eyeing NARA as a target of additional scrutiny.

Biden's classified documents issue adds to House Republicans' growing list of investigations. Rep. James Comer, the Kentucky Republican who now chairs the House Oversight Committee, swiftly sent letters to the White House Counsel's Office and the National Archives, which his committee oversees.

Among the requests made in the letters were: All documents retrieved from Biden's personal office where the classified documents were found; a list of people who had access to that office; all documents and communications between the White House, Department of Justice and National Archives regarding the documents that were retrieved; and all documents and communications related to the handling of classified material by Biden's personal lawyers, including their security clearance statuses.

The Kentucky Republican asked that documents and other information be turned over no later than January 24 and that NARA General Counsel Gary Stern and NARA Director of Congressional Affairs John Hamilton be made available for transcribed interviews with committee staff no later than January 17.

Also on Tuesday, the new GOP chair of the House Intelligence Committee asked the Director of National Intelligence to conduct a damage assessment for the classified records found at Biden's private office.

	“Those entrusted with access to classified information have a duty and an obligation to protect it,” Rep. Mike Turner of Ohio wrote. “This issue demands a full and thorough review.”
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HEADLINE	01/10 Europe: 12 countries broke temp. records
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/10/twelve-european-countries-broke-temperature-records-in-2022
GIST	<p>Twelve European countries broke monthly temperature records in 2022 as the continent recorded its hottest ever summer, new analysis shows.</p> <p>Of 27 European countries analysed by the Guardian, 12 recorded their highest ever temperature anomaly for at least one month in 2022. In each case, the anomalies were more than 1.9C above the average temperature recorded between 1991 and 2020 for at least one month.</p> <p>The EU’s Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) released data on Tuesday showing Europe recorded its second warmest year on record, and its hottest ever summer.</p> <p>The highest temperature increases were recorded in late summer, October and December. In Austria, the average across October 2022 was 3.3C warmer than the average October temperature recorded between 1991 and 2020. France and Slovenia also recorded temperature anomalies of 3C or more that month. Croatia and Greece both experienced 3C in December.</p> <p>Italy was warmer than average for all but two months of the year. It recorded its highest ever monthly temperature anomaly for three different months, in May, October and December. Spain and Portugal broke records for monthly anomalies on three different occasions.</p> <p>Northern and western Europe experienced prolonged and intense heatwaves over the year. Much of the continent endured drought, and summer wildfire emissions were at their highest for 15 years.</p> <p>Globally, 2022 was the fifth warmest year on record, with the last eight years collectively being the eight warmest on record, according to Copernicus. The average global temperature in 2022 was 1.2C higher than the average across the reference period 1850-1900.</p> <p>This temperature increase was not uniform across the world. La Niña conditions caused lower temperatures across the Pacific region, meaning that Australia and South America tended to be cooler than average in 2022.</p> <p>However, temperatures were far higher in the northern hemisphere, especially in the Arctic and Europe. Temperatures are rising twice as fast as the global average in Europe and four times as fast in the Arctic.</p> <p>Samantha Burgess, deputy director of C3S, said that while weather patterns and the La Niña effect accounted for many of the lower-temperature blue areas on the maps, it was important to look at the wider trend of warming that the data represented.</p> <p>On average, global temperatures were 1.2C above the 1850-1900 average in 2022. While cooler than 2021, it marked another warm year and meant that the years 2015 to 2022 were the eight warmest on record.</p> <p>While every year from 2015 onwards saw average temperatures more than 1C above the reference level, only one year between 1940 and 2014 reached that mark.</p> <p>C3S said that parts of western Europe, the Middle East, central Asia and China, New Zealand, north-west Africa and the Horn of Africa had their warmest year on record. Temperatures were also more than 2C above the 1991-2020 average in parts of northern central Siberia and along the Antarctic peninsula.</p>

	<p>Burgess said that “right now we’re running globally at 1.2C of warming above the pre-industrial average. That means we’re very close to the Paris agreement’s cut-off of 1.5C of warming.</p> <p>“Every fraction of a degree matters. The warmer the global climate, the more extreme weather events we have. They’re more intense, they’re more frequent, and this has implications not only for people but also for ecosystems, biodiversity and habitats.”</p> <p>In response to the findings, Hannah Cloke, professor of hydrology at the University of Reading, said: “Annual and monthly average temperature records are continuing to tumble across the world. This is entirely to be expected and fits in well with scientific predictions that have been made for several decades.</p> <p>“Big monthly increases in average temperature in individual locations show us how we, as individual people, how our wider society and economy, and the natural world, are going to be increasingly impacted by rising temperatures.</p> <p>“We are beginning to see increasing droughts, heatwaves and floods affecting large regions of the world that are not used to them. The rate of change means we need to adapt our way of life quicker than we ever have before.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/11 Oceans hottest ever-recorded in 2022
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/11/oceans-were-the-hottest-ever-recorded-in-2022-analysis-shows
GIST	<p>The world’s oceans were the hottest ever recorded in 2022, demonstrating the profound and pervasive changes that human-caused emissions have made to the planet’s climate.</p> <p>More than 90% of the excess heat trapped by greenhouse gas emissions is absorbed in the oceans. The records, starting in 1958, show an inexorable rise in ocean temperature, with an acceleration in warming after 1990.</p> <p>Sea surface temperatures are a major influence on the world’s weather. Hotter oceans help supercharge extreme weather, leading to more intense hurricanes and typhoons and more moisture in the air, which brings more intense rains and flooding. Warmer water also expands, pushing up sea levels and endangering coastal cities.</p> <p>The temperature of the oceans is far less affected by natural climate variability than the temperature of the atmosphere, making the oceans an undeniable indicator of global heating.</p> <p>Last year is expected to be the fourth or fifth hottest recorded for surface air temperatures when the final data is collated. During 2022, we saw the third La Niña event in a row, which is the cooler phase of an irregular climate cycle centred on the Pacific that affects global weather patterns. When El Niño returns, global air temperatures will be boosted even higher.</p> <p>The international team of scientists that produced the new ocean heat analysis concluded: “The Earth’s energy and water cycles have been profoundly altered due to the emission of greenhouse gases by human activities, driving pervasive changes in Earth’s climate system.”</p> <p>Prof John Abraham, at the University of St Thomas in Minnesota and part of the study team, said: “If you want to measure global warming, you want to measure where the warming goes, and over 90% goes into the oceans.</p> <p>“Measuring the oceans is the most accurate way of determining how out of balance our planet is.</p>

“We are getting more extreme weather because of the warming oceans and that has tremendous consequences all around the world.”

Prof Michael Mann, at the University of Pennsylvania, also part of the team, said: “Warmer oceans mean there is more potential for bigger precipitation events, like we’ve seen this past year in Europe, Australia, and currently on the west coast of the US.”

He said the analysis showed an ever-deeper layer of warm water on the ocean surface: “This leads to greater and more rapid intensification of hurricanes – something we’ve also seen this past year – since the winds no longer churn up cold sub-surface water that would otherwise dampen intensification.”

Research released on Monday by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration showed that many extreme weather events in 2022 had been made more likely and more intense by the climate crisis, such as the heavy rain that caused devastating floods in Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

Reliable ocean temperature measurements stretch back to 1940 but it is likely the oceans are now at their hottest for 1,000 years and heating faster than any time in the last 2,000 years.

The analysis, published in the journal *Advances in Atmospheric Sciences*, used temperature data collected by a range of instruments across the oceans and combined separate analyses by Chinese and US teams to calculate the heat content of the top 2,000 metres, where most of the heating occurs.

The oceans absorbed about 10 zettajoules more heat in 2022 than in 2021, equivalent to every person on Earth running 40 hairdryers all day, every day.

The researchers also analysed salinity, which along with temperature determines water density and is a vital driver of ocean circulation. An index of the variability in salinity across the oceans reached a record high in 2022, showing continued amplification of the global hydrological cycle.

Another important feature of the oceans is stratification, where the layering of water by density becomes stronger. This restricts the mixing of deeper, cooler and more nutrient-rich waters with surface waters.

The long-term trend of increasing stratification continued in 2022, the scientists found, with “important scientific, societal, and ecological consequences”.

One consequence, said Abraham, is that less mixing in the ocean means the surface layer absorbs less carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, increasing global warming.

The researchers also said: “There are increasing occurrences of record-shattering heatwaves and droughts in the northern hemisphere, consistent with intensive ocean warming in the mid-latitude Pacific and Atlantic oceans.”

The heating of the oceans, and the impacts on extreme weather, will increase until humanity reaches net zero emissions.

In October, the World Meteorological Organization reported that the atmospheric concentration of all the main greenhouse gases – carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide – had reached record highs. WMO head Prof Petteri Taalas said: “We are heading in the wrong direction.”

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HEADLINE	01/10 Scammers looking to cash in Mega Millions
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/lottery/a-billion-dollar-jackpot-scammers-mega-millions/293-00c16708-ed03-4758-959c-7dd2d987bce2
GIST	ATHOL, Idaho — The calls started coming in to Dawn Olejniczak early Tuesday morning.

	<p>"Kept calling me back over and over and over again," the Athol, Idaho resident explains.</p> <p>The man, who she says called himself John White, told her he was with Mega Millions in Idaho and that he was waiting to deliver her prize.</p> <p>With the Mega Millions jackpot at \$1.1 billion ahead of Tuesday night's drawing the timing may have come as no surprise. Except the drawing hadn't happened yet and Olejniczak hadn't played Mega Millions since December 20.</p> <p>"He'd deliver \$2 million in a cashier's check and \$500,000 in a briefcase - cash," she says of the man's call.</p> <p>He told Dawn he needed her driver's license and gave her three numbers she'd need to claim the money. It all sounded pretty odd, but the scam became clear with his last demand.</p> <p>"As soon as he hit the \$199 gift card," Olejniczak laughs. "Mega Millions isn't gonna call me."</p> <p>"No. No, we do not call you if you win," says Kristi Weeks, Director of Legal Services for Washington's Lottery. "You have to tell us you win. You have to bring us a ticket and we will give you your money."</p> <p>Weeks often deals with victims of lotto scams.</p> <p>"I talk to these people too often," she says. "I recently spoke with one woman who lost \$2,000. To her that was a lot of money. I just wish she'd called us before she gave up the money."</p> <p>What Olejniczak experienced is common, Weeks confirms, though she says you can protect yourself.</p> <p>"If someone does call you and they want your personal information, don't give it to them. If they want you to send money, it's absolutely illegitimate," Weeks says.</p> <p>Another tip-off it's a scam -- the person is persistent and tries to rush you into acting.</p> <p>Dawn's scammer called more than 20 times from two different phone numbers.</p> <p>"Fifteen times on that number," she says, counting the incoming calls from one out-of-state line.</p> <p>She shared her story, after finally blocking those numbers, so other people keep their hard-earned cash from becoming a lucky payday for a scammer.</p> <p>"Nobody's gonna ask you to go down and get a gift card," she says of legitimate lotteries. "Especially if they're handing you \$2.5 million dollars."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Teen athletes die by suicide days apart
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/sports/washington-teen-athletes-suicide-days-apart/281-32c0e711-616d-4fa6-9b05-cefe6d820bbc
GIST	<p>PUYALLUP, Wash. — <i>If you or someone you know is in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255, text HOME to 741741 or visit Vibrant Emotional Health's Safe Space for digital resources.</i></p> <p>A wooden cross marks the spot where 17-year-old Reese Widman died. His parents say their son took his own life.</p> <p>"We just lost a brother but we gained an angel and he's always going to be watching over us and he'll always be with us on the field and off the field," Spencer Johnson a baseball coach with Steilacoom High School.</p>

Reese died on Friday, Jan. 6, two days before another high school baseball player, Solomon "Solo" Gardner from Olympia was pronounced dead after taking his own life. He was 16 years old.

The two incidents were not connected. Reese's parents said the two boys played against each other a few times and they played for the same club, but not on the same team. Reese's parents said they reached out to Solomon's parents to let them know they are not alone.

Corey Widman is Reese Widman's dad, he was also his son's high school head baseball coach.

"It has been absolutely humbling and sobering the outpour of support and love for Reese and for us, these past few days and they've been very, very hard," Corey said.

Reese was a standout baseball player that was set to play for Pierce College in the fall. A pitcher who the team relied on as a closer – a young man who saved games and now his parents hope his story will save lives.

"What needs to happen is that people know you can always have a different option – you can always talk to other people you can always get help. This is a final, final decision he made we will never get him back. He will never get a chance to step on the mound on this earth," said Kelly Widman, Reese's mom.

The Widmans say their son had a history of depression – they said they were open about the subject but never imagined they'd get that call. His fellow teammates are remembering a young man that loved baseball and loved to make others laugh.

His teammates were family on and off the field and would have helped if they had known.

"Being vulnerable, especially as a man is not a sign of weakness, I think it's a sign of strength I think it's a sign that you want to help yourself," said teammate Tristen Felizardo.

And that, they hope, is his legacy – a reminder to other students, to check in with one another – no matter how large the smile appears.

"No matter how happy someone may seem on the outside you really do never know what they're feeling inside just reach out to your friends make sure everyone is doing okay," said teammate Javin Coke.

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HEADLINE	01/10 Human-caused extinctions in Madagascar
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/madagascar-faces-millions-years-extinctions-due-human-activity/story?id=96314705
GIST	<p>The ramifications of human activity on the island of Madagascar will affect the island far longer than previously realized, scientists say.</p> <p>It could take millions of years for the biodiversity on the island to recover from extinctions spurred by human activity, according to a study published Tuesday in Nature Communications.</p> <p>The island is home to a plethora of unique animal species, including the Madagascar sucker-footed bat, an ancient family of bats that is found only on Madagascar; the lowland streaked tenrec, from a diverse group of mammals found only on Madagascar; the world's smallest chameleon; the fossa; and the ring-tailed lemur.</p> <p>At least 17 species of lemurs have already gone extinct on the island, and several other species are threatened with extinction due to human influences such as deforestation, hunting and climate change, according to the study.</p>

Researchers from the U.S., Europe and Madagascar sought to quantify the extent to which humans have disrupted the fauna of Madagascar and forecast future outcomes, assembling a comprehensive dataset of 249 living and recently extinct mammals, including species that disappeared shortly after humans first arrived on the island, such as giant lemurs and dwarf hippos.

The scientists then combined that data with evolutionary history of species and statistical models of their geographical distribution over time.

The impacts were much greater than scientists expected, Luis Valente, author and researcher at the Naturalis Biodiversity Center and the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, told ABC News.

The researchers found that it could take 3 million years for Madagascar to recover the species that have been lost since human arrival if current threats are not mitigated, the study states.

In addition, it could take more than 20 million years to recover if currently threatened species are lost as well, the researchers said.

"We knew that there's a lot of species that are threatened in Madagascar, but we didn't expect it to be such a long timescale that it would take to recover them," Valente said.

Even bat species, which can colonize islands more easily than non-flying mammals, may need about 3 million years to recover, according to the paper. The number of Madagascar's mammal species threatened with extinction has increased dramatically in the past decade, from 56 in 2010 to 128 in 2021.

The timescale, termed "evolutionary return time," will take longer than other island nations because the human impact has been limited in comparison to a place like New Zealand, Valente said. Although humans first arrived on Madagascar about 2,500 years ago, the bulk of the damage from human expansion has been done in the past 100 years, leaving much of the island's forests in pristine condition, he added.

Essentially, because Madagascar is "catching up" to other island nations in terms of detrimental human activity, it stands to lose a lot more in the future, Valente said.

"The amount of history we stand to lose on Madagascar is larger than in any other system that we've looked at," Valente said.

Deforestation for the purpose of planting crops has been the main culprit of human expansion over the last century, but communities are also beginning to encroach farther into forests to hunt bushmeat, such as lemurs, Valente said. Combined with climate change, the longevity of many species on the island is at risk.

The findings suggest that immediate conservation efforts are needed to avoid long-lasting biodiversity losses, including programs that include socio-economic improvements for local human populations, reducing forest loss in the remaining natural habitats and limiting artisanal and commercial resource exploitation, such as of hardwoods and animals for the bushmeat trade, the scientists said.

The expansion and enforcement of protected areas will be necessary as well, Valente said.

Without timely conservation actions, the biodiversity of Madagascar could be impacted for millions of years, the scientists said.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	01/10 Arrest: stole airport trucks, entered plane
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/man-busted-after-allegedly-entering-jet-stealing-airport-vehicles?ref=home

GIST	<p>A man was arrested after jumping over an airport's razor wire fence and getting inside a parked airliner, according to a report. The major security breach occurred at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport on Jan. 6, according to WXIA-TV.</p> <p>After getting into the airport's perimeter, the suspect managed to drive around in two Delta Airline F150 trucks and climb the stairs and go inside of a Southwest jet, Fox 5 Atlanta reports.</p> <p>The alleged trespasser was said to have come face to face with an employee inside the jet's cockpit before exiting the aircraft and ultimately being arrested.</p> <p>In a statement to Fox 5, Hartsfield-Jackson said airport employees had "followed protocol" during the incident. "[They] challenged the suspect to present his authorized credential, reported him to 911, maintained a safe distance while keeping him in sight and provided information to Atlanta Police officers responding to the incident," the statement added.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Toronto: man killed in 'swarming' attack
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/10/toronto-man-killed-teenage-girls-identified
GIST	<p>Toronto police have identified the man killed last month by a group of teen girls in a seemingly random "swarming" attack in the city's downtown core.</p> <p>Ken Lee, 59, was named on Tuesday as the victim of a murder that has shaken the city for its senselessness and the young age of the alleged assailants.</p> <p>Eight teenage girls are believed to have stabbed Lee at a plaza near the main rail station in Canada's largest city in the early hours of 18 December. Three of the girls are 13, three are 14 and two are 16.</p> <p>Lee, who had spent years in the city's shelter system, was the Toronto's 68th homicide victim of 2022. He was attacked after witnesses say he tried to stop the group of teens from stealing a bottle of alcohol from a friend.</p> <p>Bystanders flagged down paramedics and Lee was rushed to the hospital, but died a short time later.</p> <p>Toronto police are also investigating reports from earlier that same evening that a group of teenagers were harassing passersby.</p> <p>Officers arrested the girls nearby after interviewing witnesses, recovering a number of weapons at the scene.</p> <p>None of the suspects can be identified under Canada's Youth Criminal Justice Act.</p> <p>Investigators believe the teens involved in the attack met on social media and came from various parts of the city, but said it was still unclear why they met that evening.</p> <p>"I wouldn't describe them as a gang at this point, but what [is] alleged to have occurred that evening would be consistent with what we traditionally call a swarming," Det Sgt Terry Browne of Toronto's homicide unit told reporters December 20.</p> <p>One of the suspects was granted bail in late December and is permitted to return to school, with a judge expected to outline her reasoning for granting bail later today. The teen cannot contact her co-accused, possess any weapons or use a mobile phone. She must also remain within the province of Ontario.</p> <p>Of the seven remaining suspects, two have bail hearing dates set for later this month and attorneys are continuing to discuss the potential dates for the others.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Va. police: no fight, no warning in shooting
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/10/virginia-shooting-no-fight-or-warning-before-six-year-old-boy-shot-teacher-say-police
GIST	<p>The shooting of a Virginia teacher by a six-year-old boy in her classroom last week happened without warning, and with no fight or physical struggle, authorities have said.</p> <p>“What we know today is that she was providing instruction. He displayed a firearm, he pointed it and he fired one round,” said the Newport News police chief, Steve Drew.</p> <p>Drew offered the first detailed description of a shooting that shocked the city and was notable even in a country like the US where incidents of gun violence are common. Drew had previously said the shooting was not accidental and had declined to elaborate.</p> <p>Drew said he wanted to clarify remarks he made shortly after the incident on Friday, when he said there was an “altercation” before the shooting. He said it was more like an “interaction” between the boy and his first-grade teacher at Richneck elementary school, 25-year-old Abby Zwerner.</p> <p>Drew reiterated that the shooting was “intentional” and “not accidental”.</p> <p>Drew also revealed that the 9mm handgun used by the boy was bought legally by his mother and kept in the family’s home. He said the boy brought it to school in his backpack the day of the shooting.</p> <p>Zwerner put up her hand in a defensive position when the gun fired, and the bullet went through her hand and into her upper chest, Drew said. Although her injuries were initially considered life-threatening, she has improved and is in hospital in a stable condition.</p> <p>Drew hailed Zwerner as a hero for quickly hustling her students out of the classroom after she was shot. He said surveillance video shows she was the last person to leave her classroom.</p> <p>“She made a right turn and started down the hallway, and then she stopped ... She turned around and make sure every one of those students was safe,” Drew said.</p> <p>Drew said a school employee rushed into the classroom and physically restrained the boy after hearing the gunshot. He said the boy became “a little combative” and struck the employee. Police officers arrived and escorted him out of the building and into a police car.</p> <p>The boy has been held at a medical facility since an emergency custody order and temporary detention order were issued on Friday, Drew said. He said it would be up to a judge to determine the next steps for the boy. He also said the boy’s mother had been interviewed by police, but it is unclear whether she could face any charges.</p> <p>A friend of Zwerner told a crowd gathered at a vigil on Monday night that the first-grade teacher had shown “dedication and love for what she does day in and day out”.</p> <p>“Abby is a warrior and she demonstrates mental and physical strength every day,” said Rosalie List, a second-grade teacher at Richneck. “I’m so proud of her.”</p> <p>Lauren Palladini, Richneck’s school counsellor, told the crowd that Zwerner was “sweet. She’s thoughtful. She’s caring. And she’s been one of the most amazing teachers that I’ve been blessed to interact with.”</p> <p>Gun owners can be prosecuted under a Virginia law that prohibits anyone from recklessly leaving a loaded, unsecured gun in a manner that endangers the life or limb of children under 14. A violation of that law is a misdemeanour, punishable by a maximum jail sentence of one year and a maximum fine of \$2,500 (£2,055).</p>

	Virginia does not have a law that requires unattended guns to be stored in a particular way or a law that requires gun owners to affirmatively lock their weapons.
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HEADLINE	01/10 Baked Alaska sentenced in Capitol riot role
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/10/baked-alaska-anthime-gionet-sentenced-capitol-attack
GIST	<p>Anthime Gionet, a far-right social media personality known to followers as Baked Alaska, was sentenced on Tuesday to two months in prison for his participation in the US Capitol attack – participation he live-streamed.</p> <p>In court in Washington DC, the US district judge Trevor McFadden told Gionet, 35: “You did everything you could to publicise your misconduct. You were there encouraging and participating fully in what was going on.”</p> <p>Gionet did not address the court.</p> <p>On 6 January 2021, rioters breached the Capitol in service of Donald Trump’s attempt to overturn the 2020 election via the lie that Joe Biden’s win was the result of electoral fraud.</p> <p>Gionet broadcast to around 16,000 followers from locations including the office of Jeff Merkley, a Democratic senator from Oregon. Pretending to report a “fraudulent election”, Gionet said: “We need to get our boy, Donald J Trump, into office.”</p> <p>According to court documents, Gionet also told rioters: “Come in, let’s go, come on in, make yourself at home” and chanted: “Patriots are in control!” and “Whose house? Our house!”</p> <p>His attorney, Zachary Thornley, argued that Gionet “never crossed the line from being a protestor to a rioter” and was instead “sort of a guerrilla journalist” who was “there to document. That’s what he does.”</p> <p>Before becoming a star of far-right social media, Gionet worked for media website BuzzFeed.</p> <p>Last July, however, he pleaded guilty to parading, demonstrating or picketing inside a Capitol building.</p> <p>Gionet has had other brushes with the law. After clashes in Arizona in late 2020, he was sentenced to 30 days in jail for misdemeanor convictions and fined for damaging a Hannukah display at the state capitol.</p> <p>For his participation in the Capitol riot, prosecutors recommended 75 days incarceration and three years probation. Judge McFadden, a Trump appointee who took over the case before sentencing, handed down 60 days and two years probation.</p> <p>Also imposing a \$2,000 fine and \$500 in restitution, McFadden said that for Gionet, the January 6 riot was the “culmination of a petty crime spree”.</p> <p>Gionet spoke to reporters outside court, saying his sentence was a “win” and adding that he planned to use his time in jail to write a book.</p> <p>“I have grown immense amounts,” he said. “But I still hold firm that I was there because I believe the election was fraudulent, and I believe people should have a right to speak freely as long as they are being peaceful.”</p> <p>More than 900 people have been charged with federal crimes related to January 6. Nearly 500 have pleaded guilty. More than 350 have been sentenced.</p> <p>The House select committee which investigated the riot recommended Trump face criminal charges. An investigation by the Department of Justice continues.</p>

HEADLINE	01/11 Paris: train station attacker 'neutralized'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/world/europe/paris-attack-gare-du-nord.html
GIST	<p>PARIS — The police in Paris opened fire and “neutralized” on a man who attacked several people early Wednesday morning at the Gare du Nord train station, one of the capital’s busiest transit hubs, the French authorities said.</p> <p>Gérald Darmanin, the French interior minister, said on Twitter that “an individual injured several people this morning at Gare du Nord.”</p> <p>“He was quickly neutralized,” Mr. Darmanin said.</p> <p>It was not immediately clear what kind of weapon the man was wielding, how many people he had injured and how seriously, and what had motivated the attack.</p> <p>Gare du Nord is one of the largest train stations in Paris, with service to northern France and beyond, along with a Eurostar terminal for travelers heading to the United Kingdom.</p> <p>An authority for the TER Hauts-de-France, a regional branch of France’s national railway serving northern France, said on Twitter that the man “was brought under control, emergency services intervened and the person was taken away.”</p> <p>The police established a security perimeter and train traffic was disrupted, “but the station is still being used normally,” the authority added.</p> <p>The attack came nearly three weeks after a gunman killed three people and wounded three others at a Kurdish community center, a hair salon and a restaurant in central Paris in what French officials said was a racially-motivated attack against foreigners.</p> <p>The suspect in that case, a 69-year-old man who told the police he had a “pathological” hatred of foreigners, was indicted on charges of murder and attempted murder with a racist motive. He remains in custody.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Idaho murder suspect unknown to victims
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/idaho-murders-suspect-bryan-kohberger-was-unknown-to-victims-family-lawyer-says
GIST	<p>MOSCOW, Idaho - University of Idaho murder suspect Bryan Kohberger was unknown to the victims, according to a lawyer for one of their families.</p> <p>The 28-year-old criminology Ph.D. student is accused of entering the home of a group of sleeping University of Idaho undergrads and stabbing four of them to death on Nov. 13, according to police in Moscow, Idaho.</p> <p>The ambush claimed the lives of Madison Mogen and Kaylee Goncalves, 21-year-old best friends, their housemate, Xana Kernodle, 20, and her boyfriend, Ethan Chapin, also 20, who was spending the night over.</p> <p>Shanon Gray, the attorney for Goncalves' parents, said "no one" knew about Kohberger before the slayings.</p> <p>"Any information any of the families gather regarding connections to any of the victims will be turned over to the Moscow Police Department," he told Fox News Digital.</p>

	<p>Police documents allege that Kohberger, a student at the neighboring Washington State University just seven miles away, cased the victims' home at least 12 times prior to the murders. Then, just hours after the attack, police say they tracked Kohberger's phone back to the crime scene.</p> <p>Moscow Police Cpl. Brett Payne wrote in a probable cause affidavit filed on Dec. 29 that he obtained a search warrant for Kohberger's phone records to see if he had "stalked any of the victims," contacted their associates or spied on the King Road house.</p> <p>"The records for the 8458 Phone (Kohberger's phone) show the 8458 Phone utilizing cellular resources that provide coverage to the area of 1122 King Road on at least twelve occasions prior to November 13, 2022," he wrote. "All of these occasions, except for one, occurred in the late evening and early morning hours of their respective days."</p> <p>Kohberger faces four charges of first-degree murder and another felony burglary charge for allegedly entering the home with the intent to kill.</p> <p>Some experts have speculated that the burglary charge could be an indication that Kohberger didn't know the victims, however, they note burglary charges can still be filed if the intruder is not a stranger.</p> <p>"The burglary charge allows the prosecution to introduce evidence of the unlawful entry into the house," Neama Rahmani, a Los Angeles-based attorney and former federal prosecutor, told Fox News Digital.</p> <p>"There is no clear evidence of motive, or at least not yet, so the state wants to show that Kohberger wasn't there legitimately and there is no reason for his DNA to be there."</p> <p>Gray did not immediately respond to additional questions from Fox News Digital, but in an earlier interview with Business Insider, he said the victims gave no indication they were being watched.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Seattle authorities recover fentanyl, heroin
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/1k-grams-of-fentanyl-16k-in-cash-other-drugs-recovered-in-seattle-narcotics-operation-california-clovis-dea-cocaine-heroin-pills-methamphetamine-detectives-police-bodie-k9-bust-money-powder-skittle-authorities-distribution#
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — A search warrant allowed authorities in Seattle to recover thousands of fentanyl pills, cash, and multiple other drugs in an operation earlier this month.</p> <p>Seattle Police Narcotics Detectives worked with federal partners in Homeland Security Investigation and Drug Enforcement Administration to arrest narcotics dealers and recover the following drugs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 415.9 grams of fentanyl pills • 657.8 grams of fentanyl powder • 1528.6 grams of methamphetamine • 834 grams of heroin • 22.5 grams of cocaine <p>A three-month investigation led authorities to a drug dealer who travelled from California with plans to distribute "skittle" fentanyl pills. Officers from Seattle Police Department (SPD) travelled to California and located the fentanyl pills before the investigation was taken over by Clovis Police Department in California and the DEA.</p> <p>Police arrested a man who was in possession of over one million worth of fentanyl pills.</p> <p>Search warrants, with the assistance of a police dog named Bodie, led to 35 pounds of fentanyl pills and over two pounds of heroin being found.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Failure: blowtorching credit union overnight
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/2-men-charged-after-failed-bank-robbery-attempt-with-blowtorch-in-tumwater-washington-credit-union-bureau-alcohol-tobacco-firearms-explosives-tacoma-indictment-atf-tools-theft-heist-burglar-felony-fire-fighters-police#
GIST	<p>TUMWATER, Wash. — Federal prosecutors brought charges against two Washington men accused of spending an entire night trying to burn their way into a Tumwater credit union with a blowtorch.</p> <p>According to an unsealed indictment filed in U.S. District Court in Tacoma, Brandon Ronald Collado, 36, and Randall Taufete'e, 33, both from Olympia, face federal charges of arson, burglary of a credit union, and use of fire to commit a felony.</p> <p>Investigators from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) allege Collado and Taufete'e went to the O Bee Credit Union branch at 3900 Cleveland Avenue SE in Tumwater during early morning hours on October 24, 2022 and tried to break into the bank for four hours.</p> <p>The pair's efforts included using hand tools, power tools, and an oxyacetylene torch to breach an ATM, the night deposit box, a teller window, and an exterior door, according to an ATF report filed in court.</p> <p>ATF agents say the pair left the credit union twice during their heist and later returned with additional tools. Surveillance videos shows Collado and Taufete'e arrive at the credit union at 12:57 a.m. and leave at 5:11 a.m., the report states.</p> <p>At 5:54 a.m., Tumwater firefighters responded to an alarm call at the credit union and found flames shooting out of the top of the ATM. As the fire crews extinguished the fire, they noted the extensive damage to the credit union .</p> <p>"The damage to the teller window and the exterior door was consistent with the suspects attempting to access the interior of the credit union. It did not appear that the suspects had been able successfully gain access to the interior," the ATF report states.</p> <p>Investigators worked with credit union staff to pull surveillance video that showed the attempted heist, including the suspects fleeing the area in a Subaru station wagon.</p> <p>Three days later, Tumwater police officers were called to a reported explosion in the area of 6640 Little Rock Road SW. When police arrived at the scene, Taufete'e was found in a Subaru station wagon and asked if he heard gunshots or an explosion, according to the ATF report.</p> <p>"Taufete'e was confrontational with the officers and seemed unhappy with their presence, even though the officers told him he could leave if he wanted to. Taufete'e tried to discourage the officers from going to the back of the building, claiming that his dog was back there. However, when officers go to the back of the building, there was no dog. Taufete'e then brought a dog out of an apartment, threatening to release it. Officers interpreted Taufete's behavior as an attempt to distract them from investigating the weapons complaint," the police report states.</p> <p>The Tumwater officers then discovered a camp in a field behind the apartment with welders and torches near it.</p> <p>"There was a large tent with mesh sides in which the officers saw a large safe. The officers observed that the door to the safe appeared to have been cut with a torch," the report states.</p> <p>Police found a gun inside the Subaru and detained Taufete'e, a previously convicted felon, for unlawful possession of a firearm. The police report states Collado was with Taufete'e during this encounter, but he was not arrested at the time.</p>

	<p>Investigators suspected the pair may have been involved in the credit union heist. The Subaru from Taufete's arrest appeared to match surveillance video from the credit union, including a distinct roof rack, trailer hitch, and damage to the passenger side of the car.</p> <p>Detectives got a warrant for the car and found hand tools and the backpack blowtorch that was seen in the credit union surveillance video, according to the report. Police indicated they also recovered shoes and gloves that were seen in the surveillance video.</p> <p>Police recovered a police scanner at the scene and believe Collado and Taufete'e were monitoring it in the event an alarm at the bank was triggered.</p> <p>Court records show Taufete'e has 18 prior arrests, including 3 in 2022, and multiple felony convictions in Washington. Taufete'e was pardoned by Governor Jay Inslee for a prior drug possession charge in 2021, according to the Washington Department of Corrections.</p> <p>Collado has 6 felony convictions and 12 arrests, according to online court records in Washington.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Arrest: hostage situation in Gold Bar
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/hostage-situation-gold-bar-family-grocer-snohomish-county/281-2838cf82-2ad0-46be-a631-c6b0751b029d
GIST	<p>GOLD BAR, Wash. — A suspect was arrested after a hostage situation at Gold Bar Family Grocer in Snohomish County Tuesday evening, according to the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office.</p> <p>An armed man had allegedly taken a hostage inside the store at around 7:30 p.m., according to SCSO. The suspect and the hostage were the only ones inside.</p> <p>After law enforcement negotiated with the suspect, he surrendered and was taken into custody, SCSO tweeted just before 10 p.m. SWAT also responded to the scene.</p> <p>US 2 was closed directions between Sultan and Gold Bar, from milepost 23 to milepost 28 due to police activity, according to the Washington State Department of Transportation. The road reopened around 8:20 p.m.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Bellevue police: young boys in carjacking
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/4-young-boys-including-12-year-old-arrested-in-bellevue-after-carjacking/
GIST	<p>Four boys, including a 12-year-old, were arrested following an armed carjacking and police chase Tuesday morning that wound through Bellevue, according to police.</p> <p>The other three boys are 14, police said.</p> <p>Bellevue police were notified by a Seattle police captain shortly after 9:30 a.m. that a Hyundai Elantra that had been reported stolen was spotted in the Phantom Lake area of Bellevue. While attempting to pull the car over, the driver drove down a dead-end street and fled from the car, a Bellevue police spokesperson said.</p> <p>Bellevue officers arrived and located the abandoned car. At the same time, a nearby resident called 911 about a suspicious person in her backyard. Officers arrested the 12-year-old boy.</p> <p>As more officers arrived on the scene at Phantom Lake, they spotted a black Dodge Charger that had been involved in an armed carjacking in Renton earlier that day, the spokesperson said. The victim told police two of the suspects had what appeared to be semi-automatic handguns, according to police. Police</p>

	<p>determined the four boys drove the stolen Hyundai to the scene of the carjacking, before splitting off separately in the two vehicles.</p> <p>When police tried to pull the Dodge over, the driver sped off. The driver wound through the city of Bellevue, from Phantom Lake up north to Lakemont, police said. The car was driven quickly and blew out a tire before ending up at a trailhead near Newcastle Golf Course Road, where the three occupants tried to abandon the car.</p> <p>One of the boys, 14, was arrested in the car and the other two fled into the woods before being tracked down and surrendering shortly after 10 a.m., according to police.</p> <p>All four boys are in custody and both cars were recovered.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/10 Despite seizures, drug cartels roil Europe
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/despite-record-cocaine-seizures-drug-cartels-roil-europe-96340677
GIST	<p>ANTWERP, Belgium -- Each tiny plastic package was barely the size of a fingernail and weighed all of 0.2 grams. Still, the bags of white powder police seized in a Brussels cellar were yet another indication that a surge in cocaine and crack supply is hitting Europe hard.</p> <p>And, with it, comes unprecedented drug violence in Belgium and the Netherlands, whose ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam have proven the main gateway for Latin American cocaine cartels into the continent.</p> <p>In Belgium, the justice minister is forced to live in a safehouse, out of reach of drug gangs. In the Netherlands, killings hit ever more prominent people and there are suspicions that the reason the heir to the Dutch throne had to quit her student life and return home was also linked to threats from drug lords.</p> <p>“We almost have to see it as a war,” said Aukje de Vries, the Dutch State Secretary for customs.</p> <p>Officials in Belgium’s northern port of Antwerp on Tuesday announced yet another annual record in cocaine seizures last year: 110 tons, 23% up compared to 2021 and more than twice the amount confiscated five years ago.</p> <p>“It astounded us,” said Belgian Finance Minister Vincent Van Peteghem. “It also means the drugs that are entering Europe (undetected) through our ports are also rising. And that, of course, has a huge impact,” he told The Associated Press.</p> <p>Because with cocaine comes not only addiction, decay and death, but also violence and gang warfare.</p> <p>In the past three years Antwerp has suffered dozens of grenade attacks, fires and small bombs often linked to gangs trying to carve up the thriving cocaine trade.</p> <p>On Monday evening, the city better known for painter Peter-Paul Rubens and a famed fashion school saw the fatal shooting of a child, likely an unwitting victim of the drug war.</p> <p>“A girl of barely 11 that obviously has nothing to do with crime gangs is now the victim of narco terror that is turning ever more ruthless,” said Antwerp Prosecutor Franky De Keyzer.</p> <p>The situation in Belgium has become so bad that even Justice Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne, is living in hiding after evidence emerged drugs gangs might be seeking to kidnap him, or worse.</p> <p>In the Netherlands too, home to the global port of Rotterdam, murder and intimidation have become increasingly common as drug lords go to extreme lengths to protect their cut of the multibillion euro</p>

(dollar) market. And 50 tons of cocaine were seized there last year which, combined with Antwerp, made for another record year.

Among high-profile murder victims in the Netherlands in recent years were a lawyer representing a witness in a drug gangsters' trial and crime reporter Peter R. de Vries, who was a confidant to the same witness.

Unspecified threats to the heir to the Dutch throne, Princess Amalia, forced her last year to abandon student life in Amsterdam and return home. Security reportedly also has been beefed up around Prime Minister Mark Rutte. In both cases, it's suspected that drugs-related crime is a factor.

And in places like Brussels, where the violence might be less spectacular, cocaine and crack are starting to have a chilling effect in areas like the Marolles, a neighborhood so folksy quaint it figured in Tintin's cartoon adventures.

The chief police inspector for the neighborhood, Kris Verborgh, said South American cocaine "seems to be — or seems to have become — the new normal."

Verborgh says the cost of the base product in Colombia amounts to some 500 euros (\$536) a kilogram. A kilogram of the finished product can turn into some 70,000 euros on Belgium's streets.

"It is a massive amount of money that you can earn relatively easily," he said.

Because of that, seizures in the dozens of tons in Antwerp and Rotterdam may still constitute a losing battle in a multibillion global trade from the Latin American nations of Colombia, Peru and Bolivia to the major cities of Europe.

Brussels' Marolles is hardly ground zero of that trade and many of the 11,000 people living in its warren of narrow streets are among the poorest in the city of 1.2 million.

Yet, over the past months they have been sought out for cocaine and crack sales. Verborgh said each tiny dose of 0.2 gram sells for 20 euros, within reach of even a beggar seeking instant gratification for whom a traditional 0.8 gram dose costing 50 euros is too expensive.

"They're really targeting homeless people," said Verborgh. In a cocaine seller's world, it makes economic sense.

Fixers sometimes sell crack ready-made to be smoked on the curbside of once tranquil streets, even in a subway station with families walking by. Gangs start intimidating locals not to squeal, hurl rocks at passing police vans and try to turn streets into no-go zones for police — who Verborgh stresses, are not giving in.

Since mid-October, there have been 115 arrests in the neighborhood. The power of the gangs is such however, that within half an hour a new seller may be on the same corner.

And increasingly, the young are drawn in to the expanding trade. "Several years ago, we never saw somebody who was 12 or 14 years. Now we see them being more or less part of the gangs," doing things like stakeouts, Verborgh said.

Just last week, police in the Marolles stumbled upon a cache in a seemingly deserted cellar where they found cocaine and other drugs, precision scales, a drone, pepper spray and two swords. One of the two teenagers arrested there was 14.

"Well, it's a problem because normally a youngster of 12 or 14 years old should be at school," Verborgh said.

HEADLINE	01/10 Mexico students jailed for planting trees
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/mexican-students-arrested-jailed-planting-trees-96345328
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- Students and civic groups in Mexico have expressed outrage over the arrest and jailing of three students who tried to plant trees on formerly government-owned land that was sold to a private developer.</p> <p>The three were jailed this week in the western city of Guadalajara on charges of illegal land seizure and carrying weapons. The weapons charge apparently refers to the picks and shovels they used to dig holes for the trees at the site during a weeks-long protest in 2021.</p> <p>The students and local residents want a park on the large tract of land, not the high-rise luxury apartment building planned by developers.</p> <p>Many in Guadalajara were angered by the harshness of the charges against Iván Cisneros, Javier Armenta and José Rojas.</p> <p>“The excessive abuse of power against three young people who held a peaceful protest ... has reached a dangerous level that shows a lack of limits, and principles,” wrote Cesar Barba, the director of higher education at the University of Guadalajara. “Anyone who seeks justice is at risk of being put in jail.”</p> <p>The topic is touchy because the large plot in question used to be owned by the city and had been earmarked for a public park. But in a murky transaction in 2008, it was ceded to developers in exchange for public works that local media reported were never completed.</p> <p>Mexico's cash-strapped municipal governments sometimes sign off on such land-for-building deals, but they are seldom transparent. And real estate developers can wield outsized influence and act unchecked in Mexico.</p> <p>Calls and messages to the developers' offices for comment went unanswered.</p> <p>But the focus quickly shifted to Enrique Alfaro, the governor of Jalisco state, where Guadalajara is located, given the prosecutors' zeal.</p> <p>Late Monday, Alfaro posted a statement saying the charges were justified, but that he would try to get the students out on a form of bail pending trial.</p> <p>“Nobody has been arrested for protesting,” Alfaro said, noting “the land that these young people say is a park, is not a park, it is private property.”</p> <p>The civic group Hagamos Jalisco said in a statement that the 2021 protest was peaceful.</p> <p>“The demonstration involved reforesting the area, passing out information to neighbors, and camping out in the area,” the group said. “Later, they were kicked out with excessive force and violence.”</p> <p>Keeping the students jailed until their court dates later this week “is a disproportionate measure, based on the lie that they had weapons,” the group said.</p> <p>Late Tuesday, Ricardo Villanueva, the rector of the University, wrote on his social media pages that the three had been released pending trial, apparently on a form of personal recognizance.</p>
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